# THE TWO LANCROFTS

LIBRARY
OF THE
UNIVERSITY
OF ILLINOIS

823
K213t
v.2

# THE TWO LANCROFTS

BY

C. F. KEARY

AUTHOR OF "A MARIAGE DE CONVENANCE"

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.

LONDON

JAMES R. OSGOOD, McILVAINE & CO.

45, ALBEMARLE STREET, W.

1893

[*All rights reserved*]

823
K213t
v.2

# THE TWO LANCROFTS.

## CHAPTER I.

At this point Archer broke in with a remark *à travers*,—

"Everybody present, seems to be right down certain that there is no such thing as a God," he said. "But I would not seriously say that by any manner of means; though I did just now."

"Nor would I," said Hope, taking his pipe out of his mouth to spit.

"Nor I for that matter," said Sherrington.

Willie felt a good deal surprised at what seemed to him a sudden change of front, on the part of all those who had

been speaking. But he did not say anything.

"No," said Pell. "It's a proposition one could not categorically deny; no positive knowledge on the subject being possible."

"There's another thing I've noticed," said Archer, "that you hardly ever get anyone to tell you straight away either that he believes in a God or he don't. If he's more or less of what they call a *croyant*, he'll almost always answer, nine times out of ten: 'Well, how do you define the word?' or 'well, as I understand the word, yes, certainly.' I've noticed that all the time. I don't know whether you have," he said, turning rather vaguely in the direction of Gourlay, but not addressing anyone in particular. "I'd just like to divide the house. Ayes to the right, 'There is a God;' Noes, 'There isn't,' to the left. . . As far as you can tell, I mean. I don't mean what you would call scientific proof," he went on to Pell.

"That's just what they did in the French Revolution," Gourlay said, smiling, "and decreed the existence of a Deity to the comfort of all Christian souls."

"No. But I'd really like to do that all the same," Archer went on. "Which way would you vote, sir," he said to Gourlay. "But perhaps you don't like to say."

"Oh, I should vote 'ay' without any hesitation," Gourlay said unmoved.

Willie felt more and more excited.

"No: would you?" said Pell. "Then I should say you were a very bold man."

"No; I don't think so," answered the other. "I've always considered the proof of the existence of a God, a very simple affair. It lies simply in the fact that man, if you consider the matter, has never succeeded in *inventing* anything, so far as we know. And the idea of a God is a perfectly clear and definite idea; far too original to be a creation out of nothing."

"How do you mean that mankind

hasn't *invented* anything?" said Hope. "What about the steam-engine?"

"I see it," said Willie, speaking chiefly to himself, and almost trembling with inward excitement.

"See what?" Archer said to him.

"See the argument," he replied in a low tone.

"It's a darned lot more than I do, then," said the other, in the same voice.

But Gourlay was replying to Hope.

"Human discoveries only change the place of things which exist," he said, in his suave, measured tones. "The steam engine's just a case in point. In fact, this is obviously the case with all mechanical inventions. They only make use of natural forces which already exist. They change their places, bring them into fresh relations, no more than that. It is the same with the imagination, which is a matter more in point. Dreams, for instance, only make use of experience; they alter the relation of things experienced, but don't invent anything new."

"What about devils and angels, possession and miracles, and all that—what one may be allowed to call all that bag of tricks?" said Pell.

"What is said of dreams applies precisely to those notions. People imagine the wings of a bat and the ears and hoofs of a goat stuck on to a human being and then paint him black, and he becomes a devil; or the wings of a swan clapped on to another human being turn him into an angel."

"Yes; that's right enough," began Archer. "But I don't see. . . ."

But his voice was drowned by that of Hope, who said,—

"You're exactly defining what is generally said to be the origin of God, that he's purely a creation of dreams."

"Exactly," said Pell.

Here Willie's attention was distracted by Winnstay, who had long been sitting silent and apparently inattentive at his side and who now spoke.

"We were just now saying that the middle ages did invent, I thought."

"Why, that's precisely it," Willie replied. "That's precisely what I believe is the case, only I never saw it so clearly before. To invent you require a sort of *inspiration*. It comes from outside you. It's not mere invention, it's *inventum*, a discovery. That's exactly it. I never realized it before."

He spoke for himself rather than for his companion. But his ideas were working so rapidly that the perspiration broke out on his forehead, and his hand trembled as he reached it back to take the glass behind him.

Winnstay did not seem to have paid any attention. But now he leant forward and spoke so confidentially that Willie could not help listening.

"If there's no God," he said, with solemn sententiousness, "we'd better all go and hang ourselves. But I don't see that the slightest proof for the existence of a God can ever—by any possibility—

be shown. . My sister's—what you call over there . . . High Church. . . . I don't believe . . . she . . . knows any more about . . . than . . . any one else. . . . If she does she can't explain it, anyhow. . . . It's a damnable state of things," he went on, after a pause. "Here we are, all working away at art . . . devoting ourselves to the pursuit of art . . . and it's quite possible there's no such thing . . . as art at all . . . that it's all fashion . . . just a kind of trick . . . that does good to nobody, except the few who get paid for it . . . like performing monkeys. . . . And if there's no God . . . if I were absolutely convinced there was no God . . . mind you," he said, laying his hand solemnly on Willie's knee, "I'm not convinced one way or the other. . . . But if I were absolutely convinced there were no God, I should go out and hang myself or drown myself to-morrow . . . or kill myself some way," he added, as an after thought, as though he were

afraid of not speaking with perfect accuracy.

In this exordium Willie lost what was being said by the group Hope, Pell, Sherrington, and Gourlay, at the opposite side of the fire-place. Voices were being raised on all hands, and Archer from his side put in now and then a word or two. Willie felt more and more the difficulty of expressing all that was in his mind. But the more confused his thoughts became, the more certain he felt that he had made a great discovery; and he kept on repeating to himself the words "*inventum*, discovery," feeling that somehow they contained the key to this new view of Art and of Life which was dawning upon him. He said to himself that now he had received the answer to that voice which he had heard in the steamboat, and which said, "waiting, waiting;" and it was as if he felt again the influence of those thousand-fold calls of Nature, of the winds and the moaning sea, the stars swinging backwards and

forwards between the masts, the calls of breezes in the grass, of bubbling brooks, of tinkling iron on the anvil, of groaning wains, of night droppings upon autumn leaves, of the flame of a candle sending up a tongue into its own smoke, of winter firelight and pattering ashes. . . . A portentous hour had sounded in his life. . . .

But now there was a movement which brought him to himself.

"Well, Gourlay," said Sherrington, in his polite way, as he rose from his chair, "what you say is very interesting. I don't know but what it will give me a certain amount of food for reflection when I get back home. These sort of discussions don't seem to lead to very much, but they somehow serve to clear one's ideas like a sort of mental thunderstorm. Don't you think so?" he said to Archer.

"You're right. I was just about to say something of the same sort myself," replied the other. "I'm most tremen-

dously fond of what I suppose you'd call metaphysics, at times."

"It isn't so much the right time as the right condition you want, for talking about God," said Hope, as he helped Gourlay on with his overcoat, "and I've noticed the condition generally begins with the third glass of whisky and water."

"Thanks," said Gourlay, taking out his cigar-case to transfer it to the pocket of his overcoat. "Theology or the *beau sexe*," he said, smiling as he did this, "which shows what a close connection there is between them." And, after shaking hands with the four who remained, he went out with Pell and Sherrington.

But Willie thought that his presence seemed to linger after he had gone.

"Who is that man?" he said to his cousin.

"Gourlay? Oh, he's a queer chap," said Hope with a laugh, which seemed to his cousin profane. "A very nice chap

in some ways. But there's something queer about him."

"Is he French or English?" said Archer. "I heard him talking a while to Des Hérouilles and . . ."

"Oh, he's English, right enough. But he lives most of his time out here. He's a great swell on Middle Age French—stories—Romances, I mean. I'm illustrating a collection he's made for Calmann-Levy. But they say he's a regular vicious old chap; and I know he had some row with Chardet, the mesmerizing man over at the Salpêtrière. Broussailles told me the whole story, some girl that . . . No, I say, drop that!" he said, in an undertone to Winnstay, who had jumped up from his seat.

Winnstay started and stared as if he had been suddenly detected in a crime, and sat down again trembling.

"You'd better see him back," Hope continued in a still lower tone to Archer; "or he'll be dead drunk before he gets to

his rooms. I swear he's not had much here!"

Willie went back to his hotel alone.

"Is the air of Paris turning me mad?" he thought disconnectedly, "or what is it that makes everything seem so wonderful to me and so commonplace to other people? Fancy having heard the history of that Gourlay, and then forgetting it again! I hope it's not true, probably not. . . . Then nobody seemed to be the least bit struck by that argument. . . . Let me see if I can recall it. . . . No, I can't put it in words exactly. . . . But there's no doubt about it that all poetry and art and literature hang upon that proof. . . . It's the act of creation you want to arrive at. . . . I saw it just now quite clearly. . . . And I see it still. . . . 'Creation!' That's the great thing . . . to aim at . . . for literature or art or anything to aim at creation, not at beauty only. To carve a cherry stone with an original pattern. Yes, that's it. By God, I may be rather screwed . . . but I'm damned if I don't

see the gist of the matter. I wonder whether I shall think it all bosh to-morrow morning."

. . . . .

The next day did not bring a solution to the question which Willie had asked himself; for this reason, that he avoided repeating the question. But he still went about with a sense of exaltation, as one who had found the philosopher's stone of life, only that he had not immediate occasion to make proof of its qualities.

He was a good deal left to himself that day and chance brought his steps to the Bourse about the time of its fullest. The huge portico had the appearance of an ant-hill suddenly disturbed. All round it, beneath the columns, up and down the steps, swarmed the black mass. There were little whirlpools in the midst of the seething crowd of black coats and hats, tall and round, and, in the midst of each whirlpool, men standing upon chairs, shouting, vociferating. Everybody seemed to be calling out at once. As Willie drew

nearer the noise became deafening. His brain seemed to turn, and he was carried back in fancy to his London life which seemed so far away. But now, instead of his finding the clamour hateful, as he had been wont to do there, it seemed to cheer him, to inspire him.

A thick-lipped, grey-whiskered man of firm build and with a red button in his frock coat, was walking down the steps as Willie reached the foot of them. What was noticeable in him was his impassibility in the midst of all this tumult. One or two persons turned round to look at him, and he acknowledged the salute of one. There was nothing positive to be gathered from the first sight of his sallow face and bushy whiskers, nor from anything about him save the button in his coat. It was impossible to say whether he was a capitalist or an outsider, whether he was keenly interested in the affairs of the day or had only done his little item of business here; or, finally, whether he stood so secure upon a great rock of

capital that the waves of change, which were tossing others to and fro, could not assail him. Willie's faculties of observation, excited to an unnatural keenness, scanned the man's figure for subtler indications of his way of life, noticed in that moment of encounter the square set of his shoulders, the accurate fit of his frock coat, the swellings under his eyes which showed him to be at least no mere idler, and suggested that he was of Jewish blood—of German-Jewish perhaps, originally, for he was of stronger, squarer build than most Frenchmen.

"But," said Willie to himself, "if he is strong I am strong too," and he purposely stood in the way of the man who was descending with a crowd, so that their shoulders must brush. The other had not attempted to change his direction, which showed that he was used to having others give way to him. Now, however, when a shock appeared imminent a slight sudden look of diffidence, almost of fear, swept across his face; he uttered a low

"'Scusez M'sieu," and edged himself sideways between Willie and a pillar; and Willie Lancroft noticed, as the man passed him, that they two were almost exactly of a height. That moment of encounter had become symbolical to him, fraught with great issues, a contest between Creative Art and the World. Out of all that shouting and noise *he* could make music. He and he alone with the strength of one freed from servile bands, one "who having nothing yet hath all," could encounter with great capitalists and all the priests of Beelzebub and not shrink from the encounter.

. . . . .

A day or two afterwards Willie wrote again to his sister Charlie. In the course of his letter he said,—

"I have made up my mind that there is an artistic side to *everything*. And that is neither more or less than the soul of the thing which the writer (it is significant that from this time he dropped out the title of 'poet' in speaking of himself), or

the artist, or the musician has to find out or perish in the attempt. There's no such thing as invention, it is only discovery (*inventus*, you know, in Latin, or *inventio* like the 'Invention of the Cross'), that's the secret of all permanent work. I'm convinced of it—not the 'Love of the Beautiful' and that sort of thing, as I used to imagine. I can't explain to you in writing how strongly I feel this and what a difference this theory makes to me. I'm going to begin my work all over again on this basis. I mean I feel as if I were only just beginning life. I am determined, by way of a sort of discipline, to take some experience of every day and turn it into literary form, and so try by doing that to discover its soul, its meaning. I couldn't do that in verse, I don't suppose; so I think I shall take more to prose than I used to do. Perhaps, after all, verse isn't the right thing for this age. . . .

"I suppose," he added, at the end of nearly four pages on the same subject,

"you won't understand the least what I mean. You require to feel it, not see it only. But when you come and stay with me we'll talk it over."

That was not the end. The letter had taken a day or two to write, and after it had been sealed up, it was opened again for the following,—

"P.S.—I had a sort of forewarning that this Paris time was going to turn out something wonderful for me, and now what do you think has happened? Hope has actually offered to give me one hundred pounds to set up in Paris and try and follow a literary career. Isn't that splendid of him? I must say I had no idea he was such a brick. He says I could probably get artistic criticism to do pretty soon. (That's no compliment to me, for he thinks art critics the greatest fools in the Universe. In fact, it's a rum thing, but I can see that Hope doesn't think me a bit beyond the average clever. And yet he thinks I can get on. But, somehow, when I'm with him I am

stupider than I am at other times.) I'm going to live on one pound a week, all told. You can do that—lots of art students do, or on less—and I'm perfectly determined to make something out of this world before I have done with it. I feel the finger of Providence in it, somehow. I have gone through a sort of 'conversion' since I came here. It's awfully queer, but I know I am going to do something.

"I'm to come here in September; not before, because Hope is going off to make some drawings in different towns of France in the summer, and won't come back to Paris till then. What mother will say, or even Carry or Uncle Godfred I don't know. . . ."

When he had got to this point Willie, with a start of surprise at his not having done so earlier, suddenly thought of Alice Kirkwhite. His heart stood still for a moment; then a rush of tenderness came into it, to make amends for that moment of unaccountable forgetfulness.

After all for that too, this was his best chance. That, too, must be part of the scheme of Providence. With the electric rapidity of thought he had already passed the probation of those two years; he had come back to England a famous man. What was more, he had discovered that the soul of all things, which it was his mission to discover, was nothing else than love. It was sufficient for a man to love right, for him to discover the philosopher's stone of life and of art. He became an artist by that faculty alone, and could change all things, however commonplace apparently, into pure gold.

That was to be his mission henceforward.

. . . . .

It was Willie's fortune to meet Miss Kirkwhite again at Edith's a fortnight after he returned to town. She was a little surprised, but pleased, too, at the way he took her into his confidence and unfolded to her all his plans of future work. But it must be owned that this

philosopher's stone of art (so far as he was able to explain it) did not strike her as so wonderful as it seemed to Willie.

"But you could not write about everything you saw, could you, Mr. Lancroft?" she said. "It would take such an enormous time, in the first place. And then I don't see how you could make a book out of it all."

And at once Willie's new scheme of literature, his mission, his secret for turning all life into gold, appeared to him less real than they had seemed hitherto. Was the hand of Providence so visible as he had thought it?

But this impression was not permanent. There was awaiting him the fulfilment of that predestination which he had always felt for himself to be the interpreter of the world; and then his falling in love with Alice Kirkwhite (he called it that name) had come just before. So, when he went back to Paris, he never doubted that she, too, quite understood—by supernatural inspiration, for, of course, he

could say nothing yet—that she had only to wait for two years and then that they would go hand in hand to the—no, not the conquest—but the subjugation of the world.

. . . . .

But the years passed by and Willie had not grown rich and famous.

In his own plans he did not falter. He spent his time, first in Paris; then, when he had begun to get work in the lower walks of journalism, between the two capitals. In each city he plunged deep into the nether regions of life, setting up his tabernacle, now in Stepney, now in Belleville, devoting incredible diligence to the acquisition of a fluent French, the argot of the quarter. In the full spirit of his great *plan* he exercised himself in drawing from the meanest details of life, repulsive ones even, material for his art.

While at his work Willie was often so afflicted by the sight of this chaos of suffering into which he had plunged, that he determined that he would finish

a certain number of these studies, these stories, but that after that he would write no more. He would devote himself to lessening some of the poverty and wretchedness that he had encountered.

But, strange to say, as soon as his work was finished, all this sense of horror and oppression left him. These terrors had taken an artistic form, they had been translated into the region of spiritual things, they haunted him no more.

All Willie's golden dreams had given place to this work. Alice Kirkwhite became a paler and paler shadow for him. She passed, he scarcely knew how, out of his horizon; until one day he saw her marriage announced in the paper; then for twenty-four hours he thought that, although he had let her slip away thus, he had been working always for her, and that now his object in life was gone. But this feeling did not last. He vaguely remembered too how he had dreamed of a great epic of nature, of human history; how in those days man-

kind, in its squalid realism of to-day, had seemed a discordant note in the harmony of the world. Now, strange to say, it was rather the voices of nature, of the winds, the floods that had lost their meaning.

As he worked and worked, moreover, he began to care less and less for the recognition which he had expected to follow close upon the outset in his new career. But when he had ceased to think about results, first one then another of his stories began to attract attention. By one, by two, by three, they found readers, who talked of them to other people. At last the literary astronomers awoke to the fact that a new star had sprung up in the firmament of English literature; not a star of great lustre probably, but still one that shone by an original and not a borrowed light, and which required to have its place marked in the chart of the heavens.

## CHAPTER II.

Round one side of Strathclyde Square to Strathclyde House, which stands at the north-west corner, there drove one afternoon in June an endless succession of landaus, victorias, hansoms, and, now and again, even a four-wheeled cab; and the tenants of these vehicles, once arrived within the double gates of the house, sat patiently in the veiled London sunlight to await their turn to descend on to the piece of red cloth which stretched down the steps of the portico to the gravel sweep. Over the red cloth was an awning, and beside the awning stood a group of men-servants, tall, handsome men for the most part, with and without powder, and generally in long drab coats with various coloured facings—black,

brown, green, blue, red, striped blue and white. Whenever a cab or carriage stopped before the awning, one of the finest among these precipitated himself to open the door, and the other servants stood grouped on either side of the awning. They all gave a certain impression that they were taking a silent part in a ceremony; much as you may see, in the greater functions of the Catholic Church, one priest standing to elevate the Host, and half a dozen men grouped round him on the altar steps in positions which have, no doubt, been carefully studied, but which to the unpractised might seem accidental and without meaning.

The red and white striped awning led to a portico, at each end of which were tiers of flower-pots. Between these and the open folding doors were two benches, and alongside these benches were two other groups of men-servants. A few at the ends of the benches, almost hidden among the flowers, were sitting down: all

those near the door were standing up. Between these groups moved and passed on into the house a constant succession of ladies and gentlemen. Of the former, those who were middle-aged wore, for the most part, dresses of Indian silk, or of very thin cashmere or cloth, of which the ground colour was, in nine cases out of ten, drab or grey; they had short cloaks of the same material so puffed up at the shoulders that their profiles could hardly be seen; and their dresses were varied by the most elaborate conceivable arrangements of needlework, of braiding and of lace. On their heads they wore bonnets, of the same tint as their dresses, but of a material which seemed light as the foam of the sea, and as indefinite in shape.

The younger women were generally dressed on the same plan, only that their dress was less ornamented, and seemed to fit closer to the figure. These wore no cloaks, but often jackets which fitted so tightly that a casual observer would hardly have detected their exist-

ence. Most of them wore hats instead of bonnets, wide hats with large feathers, as the fashion was at that moment. Some of the younger women, however, wore muslin dresses and sailor hats.

As for the men, they were clad for the most part in long frock coats which were left open and, when they walked quickly or jumped down from their cabs, floated gracefully behind them. Their waistcoats (to anyone who had been judging from the standpoint of Pure Reason), must have seemed ridiculously short, in comparison with those long floating outer garments. But everybody must have admired the length of trouser which the majority displayed, the peculiar endowment of the English gentleman in co-operation with a good tailor. Some wore gloves; some only carried them in their hands crumpled up in a curious awkward way, which was meant to imply either that they had only just taken them off, or that after a moment's hesitation they were just about to return them to their

pockets; but the moment of hesitation endured indefinitely. No one came up the steps frankly bare-handed but one old gentleman with rather long white hair, a hat by no means new, and a black satin necktie tied in a bow. And Willie Lancroft, who was but one step behind him, felt as he watched the man's profile and whole bearing that he was a reproach to himself, and to all the better-dressed people there.

Arrived within the folding doors, the guests found themselves in a large hall, paved with marble and with marble columns, from the back of which a double staircase—marble likewise—ascended in Italian fashion. Inside the door the servants had undergone a transformation. They all wore powder and had all the same cutaway drab coats with aiguillettes on them, the same blue and yellow striped waistcoats and blue plush knee-breeches. Some of the guests stood talking for a moment in the hall; some, at the invitation of a man who was not in

livery, passed into a tea-room on the left. But the great majority, among whom was Willie Lancroft, walked straight through the hall beneath the Italian staircase, until they found themselves on a terrace overlooking a landscape garden, so large or so well arranged, that there was nothing to show the spectator from that point, that he was not a hundred miles from London.

A crowd of people was on the terrace. Willie took in the general effect without the details ; long dresses training on the gravel ; people passing and repassing as if in some mystic dance, some of them brandishing (as it seemed) tea-cups or coffee-cups in their hands. To the right a band was playing. Someone had called out his name when he passed through into the garden ; one little group (two men, of whom one had a long fair moustache, talking to a lady *d'embonpoint* and with a high colour) had turned round to look at him ; but it produced no other effect. This did not distress him much,

however, and he stayed where he was to study more of the details of the picture.

He was twenty-nine now. It was five years since the famous Paris expedition which he thought was to change his whole character and outlook on life. There can be no question that at any rate it had changed his career. In appearance he was not much altered. He went clean shaven like a barrister—for the hair on his mouth and chin had never grown satisfactorily. His face was rather large, just missing the reproach of being fat, with well-shaped mouth, and with the same sullen look from a little distance, redeemed by the look of simplicity and friendliness in the large blue eyes, which were less dreamy, more observant than they had been of yore. He was on the way to become a distinguished man, and of course thought himself more distinguished than he was. It may seem a reproach to his good nature that the element in his success which he dwelt on with most permanent satisfaction, was the fact that

he had quite caught up (he did not say more than "caught up" to himself, but his inner thoughts said "passed,") his cousin during these five intervening years.

For a moment he stood rather apart, between the crowd and the band; and the strains of an air of Sullivan filled his mind with its mocking pathos.

"Now, there's Mr. Lancroft," he heard a voice say—the voice had an American accent. "He could do one if he chose."

He turned round to where a lady seated in a chair, and holding behind her head a red parasol, was talking to three gentlemen.

It was Miss Lemoine, the American actress, as she was generally called; for she had made her début in New York. But, as a matter of fact, Thyrza Lemoine was a Canadian, not an American; and her real name was Thyrza Winnstay. Willie had already renewed acquaintance with her after the long period which had intervened since he had met her first in

Paris. When he had come back to Paris in September, nearly five years ago, to settle there, Thyrza had gone. Hope himself did not know what had become of her; only that his friend had died suddenly while he and his sister and a parson were travelling in Switzerland together. Then Thyrza had disappeared; had gone back to Canada, Hope supposed. But she left no address.

It was about a month since Willie had met Thyrza again after this interval. She had now taken the name of Lemoine—her mother's name—in deference to the susceptibilities of her father's family, who were Plymouth Brethren, as she explained to Willie.

"How do you do, Mr. Lancroft?" Thyrza said. "I was just saying that you could write one if you chose."

"Write what?" said Willie, who was a little confused by the crowd and this meeting with Thyrza. He had made a slight motion to shake hands with one of the three men, Clumber, the theatrical

critic, whom he had met. But as it was not responded to, he drew back his hand.

"Now you don't give me the answer I expected," Thyrza spoke with a more deliberate and more American accent than she used to have—or else it was more noticeable here than it used to be in Paris. "Everybody but you would have said, 'I'm sure I could if only I knew what it was.' I'm disappointed in you, Mr. Lancroft. It's like giving one the wrong cue, isn't it, Mr. Warthorpe?" she went on, turning to one of the three men beside her chair. "Do you know Mr. Lancroft, by-the-way? Let me introduce you. Mr. Warthorpe, Mr. William Lancroft. You know his writing, of course?"

"I suspect Mr. Lancroft is too original to do the expected thing," said the man addressed, smiling beneath his waxed black moustache, and holding out a lavender kid glove, but without giving a direct answer to Miss Lemoine's question.

Willie felt a thrill of satisfaction at this recognition. He knew Mr. Warthorpe (pronounced Warthrup) by name; and though in his heart he considered his work of no consequence, he knew him to be, in a sense, a figure in contemporary literature. He was very much "in with" the literary and dramatic world, and to be known by reputation to him showed that one was somebody.

As a matter of fact the drawing-room author could not recall for certain whether he had ever heard Mr. Lancroft's name before. Yes, of course he had—as an illustrator; Xavier had talked about him. What on earth did the little Lemoine mean about his being able to write a play? (Adolphus Warthorpe himself painted little pictures, wrote little plays, criticized those that other people wrote. But he never admitted the possibility of anyone else having such varied accomplishments.) Or was his memory playing him false? At any rate his *savoir faire* had got him

out of the difficulty, and he smiled blandly at Willie Lancroft. His smile was the most meaningless smile which it would be possible to conceive.

Meanwhile, Mr. Clumber had shaken hands with Willie. "I think we've met before;" and the latter was likewise introduced to the third man of the party, Bryan Kennedy, the actor.

"Well, now," Miss Lemoine went on, "I'll tell you what we were saying, Mr. Lancroft. That you could write a play in the new style. By new style I mean a kind of Ibsenish thing, strong character studies and not all situations. I should like to play in something new myself; and I'm sure you'd like to criticize something new, Mr. Clumber. . . . Then you might say something new about it!" she added, as if musing. Bryan Kennedy smiled broadly, and shot a rapid glance at Miss Lemoine, then at the dramatic critic.

Mr. Clumber, however, was not paying attention. He was trying to catch the

eye of a little old lady in black who had a thin, lined face, a long nose, thickening at the extremity, and a rather beautiful mouth which turned down very much at the corners. She had just emerged through the French windows of the drawing-room. She stooped much, and dragged herself across the grass as if movement, as if existence generally, were more trouble than they were worth.

"Oh, there you are, aunt," said a very well-dressed handsome young man, coming to meet her.

"Get me a chair, Ralph. Where's Arabella?" the old lady said, in a complaining voice. "That gentleman seemed as if he wanted to bow to me," she went on, when she was seated, giving the faintest jerk of the back of her head towards Mr. Clumber. "Who is he?"

"Oh! that's Warthorpe," said Ralph, looking in the direction which he thought was indicated.

"No, no! I know Mr. Warthorpe. Is he here? Bring him to talk to me;

he's always so amusin', and he can tell me who everybody is," the old lady murmured. "Is that Ela Featherstone?"

"Yes, aunt."

"Who's she with?"

"Don't know, I'm sure."

At that moment the young lady spoken of turned round. "Will you put it down for me?" she said to the young man she was talking to. "Thanks, so much."

"Well, I must say good-bye, Miss Featherstone. I'm off to Hurlingham," her companion said when he had done this.

"Must you? Good-bye. What a shame, killing those poor pigeons."

"Somebody must kill them, or you couldn't eat them, you know; and I'm willing to throw myself into the breach."

"Or on to the breach-loader. No, don't pretend to think that clever, because I know it was only stupid. Good-bye." Then she saw the old lady in black.

"How do you do, duchess?" she

said. "How do you do, Captain Vansittart?"

"How do you do, my dear?" The old lady still spoke in her complaining voice; but she held the younger one's hand for a moment longer than she did with most people. "How energetic you are! Have you seen Arabella Strathclyde anywhere? I want to speak a word to her, and then I must run away." (She did not appear to see the humour of using the word "run." Nor, for that matter, did her companion. For a sense of humour is out of place in the presence of the upper ranks of the peerage.)

Willie Lancroft had been taken up in listening to the conversation which Thyrza was keeping up with her other companion; not because there was anything specially interesting in the talk itself, but from the impossibility he found of fitting on this Thyrza Winnstay to the Thyrza Winnstay of former days; and, with his instinct of romance, he was trying to imagine what might

have been her history during these intermediate years. Since she had renewed acquaintance with him, Thyrza had not seemed disposed to put it upon an intimate footing. She had scarcely once made mention of any of their former friends in Paris. All this was of course natural enough, seeing that that Paris epoch had come to such a terrible close for her.

## CHAPTER III.

For all his interest in the conversation which was going on beside him, Willie Lancroft had been unable to resist the attraction of looking at the girl he heard called Ela Featherstone. She was red-haired—frankly unblushingly red-haired—and red-haired people always had a particular fascination for Willie. Contrary to the prejudices of many peoples and many proverbs, he was always disposed to trust the red-haired person in any company. What he saw of this girl added to his feeling of confidence. She had a frank and taking face, rather freckled about the forehead and eyes, but not enough so to make her complexion a yellow one; and she had very bright eyes set in dark thick auburn

lashes both above and below. Altogether it was such a face as one would expect to see rather over an Eton jacket and turn-down collar, than over nearly five feet of Surah silk drawn in about a waist sufficiently slender and broadening out to shoulders which, if the fashion of dress had not concealed the defect, would have had the fault of being rather too square for a woman.

At this moment Captain Vansittart came up to Mr. Warthorpe and shook hands with him.

"How do you do, Warthorpe? My aunt's here; will you come and speak to her?"

At which Mr. Warthorpe said, with a good deal of *empressement*, "Oh, is the Duchess of Bromley here?" and without very much ceremony he left Miss Winnstay's side and joined the other group. Mr. Clumber made a step forward when Warthorpe went up to speak to the duchess. Then he stopped, looking on, but not venturing to advance nearer.

Bryan Kennedy had left them a moment or two before.

"Don't *you* desert me, Mr. Lancroft," said Miss Lemoine to Willie. "I don't fancy being cut out altogether by an old creature like that, though she *is* a duchess. I think I'm getting rather tired sitting here, and that I'll just get up and go towards those ices. I'm sure you'd like to come along and have an ice too."

But they had not advanced three steps before Mr. Warthorpe overtook them.

"Will you allow me to introduce you to the Duchess of Bromley?" he said, "she admired you so much in *Léonie*, and has asked to be introduced to you."

"Well, I suppose I must," said Miss Lemoine, speaking half to Willie Lancroft. "You're not allowed to say 'no' in this country, when a lord or his wife asks to be introduced to you. But I intend to have one of those ices in three minutes."

At the same time, Willie detected a

look of relief in her face. "I am sure she did not want to talk about old times," he said to himself. He did not suppose that she either intended or would be able to come back to him as she had half promised. But he waited where he was for a moment, and watched the meeting of these two women.

The Duchess of Bromley spoke in such a low tone that her words were inaudible. But, occasionally, part of the talk of Miss Winnstay, who was standing just behind the Duchess' chair and leaning over it to speak, caught his ear.

"The poor man was in the most awful fright that ever was. He—" and Willie heard no more.

But how graceful she looked in that attitude! Certainly there was not much of the old Thyrza Winnstay in her now. Her figure had learnt more pose than it possessed of old. In the blue-grey dress she wore, she made him think of an angel of Ghirlandajo's that he used often to look at in the Louvre. Her very

voice had changed and taken deeper and more varied inflections. What a curious picture it all made, of homage to rank as it is paid in England, raised almost to the height of poetry! Mr. Warthorpe wreathed his face in one of his meaningless smiles. Not a ghost of one illuminated the old lady's thin drooping lips.

"That reminds me of a story I heard the other night . . ." Warthorpe was beginning.

Miss Featherstone had strolled off with Captain Vansittart, and was talking to him as she ate her ice. Willie felt a grudge against the man for being so handsome, so bronzed and so well dressed. . .

He turned away and wandered down the garden; past May bushes which were not yet over, and chestnut trees which were in full flower; past people in the smartest possible dresses. There were some lawn-tennis courts at the end of the garden, and gleams of white flannel

and of racquets reached him from beyond the bushes.

"Oh, yes, we're going to take a house-boat down to Henley."

He was close by a group of people, two middle-aged ones; the rest young men and girls. And he passed on.

"How stupid it all is," he said to himself. "The world would be a very tolerable place but for its amusements. Why did I come?"

"In order to study character," his conscience answered at first. But being in a fit of honesty, it corrected itself. "Simply because Lady Strathclyde is a very smart person; and to be asked to her house gives a cachet to my success as an author. How unutterably snobbish! Lady Strathclyde's opinion on a book isn't worth that of Mudie's youngest assistant." And at that thought, his imagination went off at a tangent to a speculation on what his brother bank-clerks of old days would be doing with themselves that fine spring evening.

Beverley and Clay would be boating for a "moral." Scobell would be playing cricket, Hanbury and Marshall going for a walk. All this was sensible, human, natural; but to be strolling about in this garden, doing nothing but looking at fashionable dresses: what an occupation was that for a creature endowed with reason! At that moment Mrs. Amberley, a lady who was a connection of the Harwoods and whom Willie had met in society, advanced towards him with her face beaming.

"So glad to see you here, Mr. Lancroft, because I want to introduce you to a very charming young lady who's been reading your book. Perhaps I ought to say one of your books. You know they are too dreadful for me. I like something more cheerful, I must say. I left her on the terrace, I only hope she won't have gone. It's Ela Featherstone."

Willie thought at once that there was nothing at all inhuman in his having

come there that evening. He began to walk too fast for Mrs. Amberley.

"We won't walk quite so fast, please. Yes, I thought them dreadful. Did you see any of those things happen? I read the one about the German student (Which one *does* she mean? thought Willie to himself) who hanged himself — no, in Paris wasn't it? Ela Featherstone was a student in Paris herself."

"How very odd," Willie thought. "It makes a bond of sympathy between us, almost."

"Ah, there she is!"

Ela Featherstone was just shaking hands with a lady and gentleman. "We shall meet again to-night, then." Then she turned round and smiled at Willie, before Mrs. Amberley had well introduced them.

"I don't like Mr. Lancroft's stories one bit, as I have told him. But no doubt they're very clever. Directly I told him who it was who wanted to be introduced

to him, he began walking so fast I could hardly keep up."

"You know my cousin Maitland, don't you?" Miss Featherstone said.

"N—no," said Willie, surprised into a stammer.

"Oh, I thought very likely he knew you. He sent me your book to read, *London and Paris*, I mean. I was immensely interested by it, especially by the Paris stories. Of course, I think it's too realistic, though I daresay it's all true enough. I was in Paris myself once, for a year. I got to know that Russian girl, a sculptor, whose picture made such a sensation at the Salon this year. Did you ever meet her, Mdlle. Igratieff? I didn't know anything about the French realists—or naturalists I suppose I ought to call them—till I heard about them from her. Russian girls are so curious, they read everything, you know." She spoke in a well-bred, pleasant voice, not soft and full of tones like Thyrza's, but without hesitation or effort.

But here the band began to play again, and she had to raise her voice to make herself heard. "We had better walk the other way," she said, turning round. "It's impossible to talk with this band—which is playing quite out of tune, too." Willie began somehow to think that pleasant as she was to look at and listen to, Miss Featherstone was not a very easy person to talk to.

"I knew some of them in Paris . . ." he began.

"The Russians! I wonder if you knew any that I knew. Did you know the Skoptchines?"

"N—no, I m—meant I knew some of the great naturalistic writers a little, Yeyla, and De Malmaussant."

"He must be a horrid man, Yeyla. Of course I've not read anything of his. Though my cousin Maitland always says that he's not so bad as he's painted."

"Yeyla has a certain theory," said Willie. "I wish I could explain what it

was. But I don't know that I can very well. . ."

"But anybody might have a theory," said Miss Featherstone. "That doesn't excuse him from writing horrid things, which must do harm. What good can it do for people to know all those dreadful things that I am told he puts in his books, I mean all the tragical, miserable things? Perhaps you think it may make them more ready to relieve suffering. But I think it's much more likely to make them hard-hearted."

"Oh! It's not that," said Willie. You don't write to make people either soft-hearted or hard-hearted, y—you—"

"No, I know. I suppose you would say art for art, wouldn't you? I suppose I am not enough of an artist to understand that. But I must confess I think art should do good in the world."

"Y—yes," Willie stammered a little. Of course art should do good in the world, and I've n—never quite under-



LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

stood what people mean by art for art, but—"

Well, I suppose art for the sake of producing beautiful things, isn't it? That's what I always thought that art for art meant. But then surely the things produced should be beautiful?"

"Well—yes—but—"

"Perhaps you don't agree with me. You would say they must be true, wouldn't you?"

"Yes. I suppose I should. What I wanted to say was that"—and Willie felt that he was growing slightly confused in his mind—"that you draw what you see, w—without—"

At that moment the form of Mr. Sloane-Jarvis emerged from behind some rhododendron bushes. It was no surprise to Willie to meet him here, as in what he had seen of society he had met him more than once. He smiled very cordially, and Willie smiled back not less so. But he found when Mr. Sloane-Jarvis came up that all his *empressement*

was for Miss Featherstone. The idiotic handshake of fashion was then at its worst phase, and Mr. Sloane-Jarvis seemed almost to exaggerate the phase that it had reached. And yet his greeting to his friend was cordial enough.

"Ah, Lancroft. This is very pleasant," he said; then, turning back to Miss Featherstone, "One seems to meet almost all one's friends this afternooon. Have you been here long?"

"We have, rather," said Ela Featherstone. "I expect my mother will be wanting to go now."

"I'm unlucky. There was a little garden party at Lady Trevithick's; I just looked in on my way, so I got here a little late. It's curious that I should meet you here. I've been lucky enough to secure your cousin Maitland to dine with me this evening."

"Has Maitland been here?" said Ela, in surprise, with a note of vexation.

"Oh, no," Sloane-Jarvis smiled in his bland way. "I don't think Featherstone

would condescend to honour a function of this sort."

"Well, good-bye, Mr. Sloane-Jarvis," said Ela, rather abruptly. "Mr. Lancroft, will you take me to my mother? I think I see her over there."

"You would like my cousin Maitland," said Ela, as they moved away. "Could you come some afternoon to my mother's? I'll introduce you to her." And the ceremony was gone through.

Lady Featherstone was a short, fat lady, well dressed, but rather heavily for that hot weather, with a face that anybody but a physiognomist would say was an eminently good-natured face. A physiognomist might have said that the good nature depended upon her getting her own way, at any rate in matters which she considered important.

. . . . .

When Willie left the house he determined to walk—somewhere. It had been rather an exciting afternoon. He wanted to collect his thoughts.

Certainly there was something in these gatherings of smart people which seemed to make the rest of life seem rather tame and vulgar, he thought, as he walked out of the gate once more. "Probably, however, it is only because *we* are vulgar," he said, with his inveterate candour. And he thought of a wedding he had seen in a little French village, near Paris, where the daughter of one of the most prosperous cultivators was being mated to "un Monsieur de Paris," a doctor or an engineer or something. He saw on one side the Paris friends of the bridegroom, who had come to stay at his inn, all grouped in front of the "hotel"; and opposite to them, standing out against a white wall, a group of the villagers, men and women in blouses and blue print dresses, some children with blue handkerchiefs round their fair heads. The group formed a beautiful picture, a wondrous contrast to the vulgarity of the others.

But from this point his thoughts

wandered to the red-haired girl, Miss Featherstone, and he thought as much of the conversation they had had as though it had been on a subject of importance. Her eyes were certainly wonderfully bright; not large, of a bluish-green, and pleasantly shaded by their double rows of dark auburn lashes—particularly friendly eyes, that was the character of them.

## CHAPTER IV.

It was seven o'clock when Willie left the garden party. It seemed impossible to settle down to work that evening. Should he dine at his club? Should he dine somewhere new? The London streets looked changed somehow. How full London was of the possibilities of enjoyment! He had never realized this as he did at this moment. Every advertisement that caught his eye emphasized the fact. An oratorio at the Albert Hall. Why didn't he go to more of those things now he had money, and could afford himself leisure? And then, by the way, there was the opera, and lots of plays he wanted to see. But, after all, life, society, was better than any play. And how many nice people there were in all

the different societies that he frequented. He felt marvellously well-disposed towards all the world.

He did eventually address his steps to the Grattan, but it was rather late when he sat down to dinner, and there were only a few tables filled. Presently one of the servants of the club, a man in plush breeches and silk stockings, came up to him.

"Beg pardon, sir, you've not been here long, have you, sir?"

"No, only about ten minutes. Why?"

"Because Mr. Yardley, he sent half an hour ago from the strangers' room to inquire if you was here, sir. Mr. Lancroft, your cousin's dining with Mr. Yardley. But I think they've pretty well finished dinner now, sir."

"All right, I will see them in the smoking room."

"Delightful," thought Willie. "That's just what I should like to-night, to spend an evening in the smoking room and find Hope there."

J. Callan



A part, an unrecognized part of the pleasure which Willie had now in meeting Hope was the consciousness that they met on an equality.

Hope had been in England some weeks, and though he was not a member of the Grattan, he was pretty often to be seen there. He and his cousin met frequently, made plans for dining together, and were, so far as Willie's consciousness went, on the most cordial terms. But Hope, on his side, nourished a certain feeling of resentment which he never expressed, and, indeed, could not have put into words. It was not precisely jealousy of the other's success, but rather of the complete independence of his cousin. It seemed unfair and unnatural to Hope, who had not asserted, but always assumed, his own intellectual superiority. Hope himself had not perhaps advanced with such strides as people had expected. But still he had, at any rate, the most solid and tangible results to show for his work. As an illustrator he could ask almost

what prices he chose. And last year there had been brought out by Hachette in Paris an elaborate, almost an epoch-making work on the history of Black and White in the present century, and Hope's name, with a beautiful specimen of his workmanship, had closed the list. To a certain set of cultivated people, to collectors, to Slade professors in London and Cambridge, to such men, for example, as Mr. Warthorpe, or perhaps even Mr. Sloane-Jarvis, Hope was the most distinguished of the two Lancrofts. But the fact remained that his paintings were not successful; and, what was worse, that the more elaborate and imaginative work which he was always projecting—illustrations of the *Commedia*, of Heine and Thieck—never came off.

Willie Lancroft met Fosbroke Cole, that well-known wit, at the door of the strangers' smoking room when he went thither.

"How do you do, Lancroft?" Cole said. "Your cousin is there. I've never met

him before. What a clever fellow he is."

But somehow Willie felt sure from the other's manner that Hope had rubbed Fosbroke Cole up the wrong way.

"That's why he was so cordial to me," Willie said to himself, ashamed of the thrill of pleasure which he could not help feeling at this recognition from such a well-known man of the world.

Hope nodded to his cousin when Willie came into the room, but went on speaking to Yardley.

"Well, I must say your professional wit seems to me rather small potatoes. . . . That was Fosbroke Cole who went out it seems," he said to his cousin.

"Oh, I know, I know him," Willie said, sitting down before the other two.

"He has been dining at our table, but I didn't catch his name. I suppose he's what you'd call a professional diner-out in these parts," Hope said to his companion.

Hope at times affected a complete ignorance of English social life.

"Yes, that's it," said Yardley, "we're hardly smart enough for him."

"Oh, I know that sort of Johnnie . . ." Hope began.

"Is Cole like that?" said Willie. "I didn't know that in the least."

"Well, you know most people are like that more or less," said the tolerant Yardley.

"Over here, perhaps. Diamonds act on the ordinary British diner-out as a sort of mental stimulus, as coffee and strong drinks do upon ordinary Christians," said Hope.

"Well, if they say really good things," said Yardley, "and Cole certainly does that sometimes, I don't care how they come by their wit."

"But I care *where* they come by it, name of God," said Hope. "It's not much use to me if I haven't got any diamonds handy to set them going. That blessed Christian hardly spoke a word

the whole time he sat at dinner, except something about the committee and the wine."

"Who were you speaking of?" asked a middle-aged man aside to Yardley, who had got up to shake hands with him.

"The *where* has a good deal to do with it, certainly," said Willie. "I make all my *bons mots* when I'm alone in bed."

"I'm glad to hear you make them anywhere," said Hope, a trifle brutally.

The new-comer, who was in evening dress, had brought in a pipe in his hand. He was now filling it from his pouch.

"You're like me," he said, as he came close to Willie to take a match from the table.

He had a curious, rather monkey-like face, with a straight mouth, a thin upper lip, and an under lip which protruded below it and made a deep hollow above the chin. His hair was a reddish grey and very thick. Willie had met him before now in the Grattan Saturday-night supper room—a celebrated institution at

which many people were seen who were not members of the club.

Willie suddenly recalled, with something like a throb of pleasure, that he had heard the man called Featherstone; and he now at once divined that he was the cousin of the girl he had met that afternoon.

At this moment Sloane-Jarvis came into the room.

"Forgive my leaving you," he said, in his rather elaborate manner, to Featherstone. "You'll take some coffee, won't you? I see you've got your pipe out. Do you really prefer it to a cigar? Ah, Lancroft," he said to Willie, "how pleasant to meet again!"

The new comer turned round and spoke to him in a low voice.

"Yes, you ought to know each other," said Jarvis, raising his own. "Let me introduce you—Mr. Featherstone, Mr. Lancroft. And this is the other Mr. Lancroft," he said, moving a step nearer to Hope, "Mr. Lancroft, the artist. Both celebrities, *arcades ambo*."

"That doesn't mean both Academicians, does it?" said Hope, as he shook hands rather perfunctorily with Featherstone.

Then some more members came in. The strangers' smoking-room became unusually full—"And full of a nice sort of members too," Willie said to himself.

"Everything is perfect to-day," he said to himself. "This is just how I should like to end a day. Grossart too. It's delightful that he's come in—just the sort of man I like. And this Featherstone is evidently as nice as they make 'em. It's delightful how many friends I have now. How few I had in old days!"

Maitland Featherstone had sat himself near Willie.

"You know Henry Gourlay, don't you?" he said.

"Oh, rather! He was very kind to me some years ago, when I began writing."

"He's a sort of cousin of mine. He sent me your book of stories, *London and Paris.* Will you allow me to say that he gave me one of the greatest treats I ever had?"

And Maitland Featherstone had such a sincerity of manner as he said this, that it became a genuine compliment. Meanwhile, the conversation of the smoking-room was still concerned with the general question of wit and diners-out.

"Of course," said Grossart—a fat man of about fifty, very popular in the club, and for the rest, a journalist of some eminence, a man stuffed with odds and ends of knowledge, and a *carrière manquée.* "All that talk about brilliant talkers and such like is the greatest rot you ever heard in your life. What does it mean? Some old chap has got the reputation of being a great *raconteur*. . ."

"It's much easier than to learn to be a third-rate actor," said Best—another popular member of the club.

Ilworthy, the antiquarian, was there,

and two other men whom Willie did not know.

McQueen, the novelist, came in at this moment, and sat himself down by Willie's side.

"The fun is," Best was going on, "when somebody who's not up to the business makes the mistake of asking two of them to meet. Then, I grant you, it's worth being there. I remember old Lady Meyburg — she went in for being a sort of Lady Holland or Lady Ashburton in little—I daresay you remember her?" he said this looking towards Featherstone, who shook his head, "getting old Hamley and Voules opposite each other at the same table. . . ."

Willie lost the rest.

"I liked that thing of yours in Shairper's, exceedingly, Lancroft," McQueen said to Willie, with grave emphasis. "I've never taken opium myself, but I must say your description of the whole process appeals more to my sense of probability than De Quincey's."

And the two writers fell into a professional talk for ten minutes.

When they again gave their attention to the general conversation, the subject had changed.

"Well, as far as the Library goes, the Oxford and Cambridge is as good as any."

"Or the Senior."

"Oh, the United Service. It's the most uncomfortable club in London!"

"And the In and Out's next to it. All stone passages."

"You were speaking of the Junior in Suffolk Street?"

"Talking of stone passages! What a ridiculous thing, the way they've lined the Junior Carlton!"

"What's that like, that new red club they've built near the Thames Embankment?"

"Oh! It's an awfully cheap club, chiefly meant for country members—solicitors, and election agents, and that sort of thing!"

"They've got two or three thousand members, I believe. I belong, but I don't go."

"There's another immense one they've built, facing the river."

"Yes; that's the Liberal ditto. They've stuck me down to be a member of that. But I don't suppose I shall ever go inside it either," said Grossart, looking across to the Tory who had spoken before.

"They have speechifying there, and that sort of thing. I've joined too, for the sake of the party."

"Wonderful how clubs have increased in number and size in the last thirty years!" said a grey-haired, grey-bearded man who had not spoken yet.

"Clubs are the only inventions of which the present century has any right to be proud," said Best, who was an old-fashioned Tory.

"Rubbish! The only inventions! In the first place, they're not inventions of this century," said Grossart.

"The only social institutions which are worth a rap," said Hope.

"So I suppose they are destined to absorb all others," said his cousin.

"How long" (it was Sloane-Jarvis who spoke), "will it take for our present social arrangements to break down altogether?"

"And yet you're a fashionable young man, Jarvis," said Grossart. "You go out to evening parties and like it, God save the mark!"

"One must go somewhere."

"Well, I don't feel any compelling necessity for my part," said Hope.

"They must. The Saints—or angels if you like—must have them," Grossart went on. "If young sparks like Jarvis or Sinclair there, or Lancroft, didn't go out, Society would die of dulness."

Sinclair was a young actor who had just come in. "Rather," he said, as he sat down.

"A surfeit of its usual food, then," said Hope.

Willie saw the grey-bearded man lean forward and whisper to Sinclair, who shook his head. He guessed they were asking who the stranger was who took so large a share in the conversation.

"It does not matter one bit whether Society is dull or not," said McQueen, "because it doesn't exist for the sake of being witty. It just exists for the sake of coupling members of the two opposite sexes."

"But then the question arises, how does it work?" said Maitland Featherstone, "and I must say that in my judgment any *agence matrimoniale—maison de confiancé*, or even matrimonial newspaper would do the matter better."

"Of course it could," said Best. "It's no affair of mine; but I must say it's terrible to think of those quarter of a million or so of unmarried women that one meets about."

"I haven't met so many," said Hope.

"Ah! That's precisely where you make the mistake," put in Willie, reply-

ing to the last speaker but one, "in supposing that Society exists for the purpose of promoting domestic happiness or even domestic unhappiness. English Society exists for the same purpose as all other English institutions, the Bar, the Bench, Parliament, Trade Unions, anything you can like to name; and that, as everybody knows, is entirely for the purpose of showing sport. Everybody here knows that the *raison d'être* of our House of Commons is an Irish night, next, at any rate, to the betting on a General Election. Those idiots of foreigners never understand that. They even question the utility of our system of cross-examination!"

"There's a great deal in what he says," said Best, approvingly.

"*Agences de confiance* would never do our business, would they?" said McQueen.

"I'm afraid Society doesn't do our business very well either," said Willie, "if the truth must be told."

"I fancy it's improving a good deal, if

you want incidents of the French kind," said Sinclair. "If you give it time it will come up to the French standard. What do you think of that row about Mrs. Mähresheim?"

"By Jove, I wonder if it will come into Court."

"Talk about *maisons de confiance.* Her house seems to be pretty much what would be called a *maison de tolérance* out there."

"What was that?" said Hope. He was told the story, and further details were discussed.

"Well, that's not so rich as a thing which happened in Paris last winter," Hope said; and from the tone of his voice Willie could tell that the history which was coming was more than commonly *scabreux.* It made Willie feel uncomfortable; not on his own account, but for the sake of Sloane-Jarvis. He had heard him in former days express such a horror of coarse speech and coarse amours. And without having heard the

story very clearly, he could not help listening at the end to hear what his ancient mentor would say.

"One must make up one's mind to meet with the unexpected sometimes," he heard him begin in his refined voice. "I remember once. . . ." and then there followed a story which to Willie's surprise was every bit as bad as Hope's. What a change must have come over this man since old days! And Willie ejaculated, mentally:

> "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, Son of the Morning!"

But he did not feel any shame or compunction for himself, that he was assisting at this orgie of speech. Somehow, things which shocked him in other people always appeared to Willie quite harmless in himself.

Maitland Featherstone may have been less pleased with the turn things had taken; for he sat himself beside Willie Lancroft and began a conversation about the latter's writings. The name of

Henry Gourlay again came on the tapis.

"He's a second cousin of mine, I think I told you. A very clever man—a distinguished man in fact, in his line," Maitland said, but with a faint tone of reserve which Willie noticed, and indeed had heard in the voices of other people when they spoke of Henry Gourlay. "I fancy he'll be over in England this autumn; in fact he's very likely going to stay with me. I wonder if you'd care to pay me a visit and meet him?"

"Oh, yes! I should like it very much," said Willie, remembering still that this was the cousin of the girl he had met at the garden party. But, on a second thought, he added, "If it could be managed—if—"

"Yes, we must settle the matter another time. Meanwhile will you dine with me at the Oxford and Cambridge some evening? Let me see; would next Friday suit you?"

"It's curious," said Willie, when this

had been settled. "I had the pleasure of meeting a cousin of yours, Miss Featherstone, to-day. And she asked me to come to their house on Thursday to meet you."

"Oh! Ela? Yes. . . Ela's an interesting girl. You'll like her I'm sure. And she's. . . ." But he checked himself. He didn't speak with the enthusiasm which Willie had expected.

"Very good; I count on you for Friday, I'm much obliged to you. I must be going now; good-bye."

Some of the members had already gone.

Hope's voice came from the other side of the room.

"Ha-ha. That wasn't bad at all." Then seeing somebody shaking hands he too got up. "Well I shall be trotting off," he said.

"So shall I," said Willie.

"We can go the first part of our way together, at any rate."

"Don't you two fellows live together?"

said Grossart, "I suppose two such stars can't shine too near each other?" Sinclair and the grey-bearded man, the only two of the company who did not know Hope, looked on with respect.

"As long as they don't live too near the river it couldn't matter," said Yardley.

"For fear of setting the Thames on fire ye mean," said McQueen.

"Exactly. If you like to have it explained," said the other, dryly.

"No, no. We don't live together. My cousin's ways are not my ways. Look at his clothes, you can see that," and Hope held up the tail of the frock coat which Willie had donned for the garden party.

"Why, damn it; he lives at a hotel all the time," Willie said, nodding towards his cousin. "It isn't that I haven't got his ways, but that I haven't got his means."

And as this was said just at the door it gave Willie the sense of having made a satisfactory exit.

## CHAPTER V.

Willie Lancroft was pleased with himself and all about him. What a day this had been! He felt a mysterious kind of exaltation which he could not explain. It seemed strange and providential that he should have made the acquaintance of that delightful Miss Featherstone and her cousin in the same day. He divined that he had made a favourable impression on the latter. It wasn't in his nature to be brilliant. But he thought that he had talked well. It was still quite a new sensation with him to take a prominent part in any conversation (for he had been very silent in mixed companies in early days), and to be listened to with a sort of deference. He was quite as considerable a person as his cousin

now, he reflected with satisfaction, as they went out together. He had never been jealous of Hope and did not in the least wish to cut him out: but he liked to think that they were on an equality. Some day he would be able to say as sharp things as Hope did, perhaps.

In the midst of these cheerful thoughts he was surprised by a grumbling sigh from his companion.

"What dull beggars!" he said; and, presently, "That friend of yours, Sloane-Jennings—Sloane-Jarvis, is not a bad chap. He told me one rather good story. He made up to me because he wants me to illustrate an *édition de luxe* of a book of his. The publishers have written about it."

"Oh, is that the *Vita Nuova?* I should think that's rather a jolly thing to do."

"I shall do it if they give me my price, not otherwise," said Hope, discontentedly, and the conversation dropped.

"By-the-bye," Willie said, presently, "it's rum, isn't it; a third person of our

old Paris set having come to the fore this season? I mean Thyrza Winnstay. I met her this afternoon at the garden party I went to."

Hope had turned round suddenly and looked at his cousin when he began this sentence. Now, however, he walked on without saying anything.

Apparently this was not going to be a conversational walk. "I must go and see her in *Léonie*; I suppose she's very good?" Willie went on for the sake of saying something. But it elicited only a grunted "Yes."

"We ought to go together and make a *claque*."

"I've been. . . . But I'll go again if you like," Hope said.

"Well, I shall certainly go as soon as I can."

To this the cousin made no reply, and the rest of the walk to the Chenies Hotel was passed in silence.

. . . . .

When Willie had left his cousin at the

door of the hotel, he turned south to the Adelphi, where he had now installed himself in a little set of chambers, meaning for the future to make London his home. This, too, was a thought of secret satisfaction to him, a sensation new enough to bring much pleasure with it. Hope was a very jolly fellow in many ways, and he had behaved like a brick five years ago. But still. . . . In fact he had sometimes paid himself back for his generosity. . . . And on the whole Willie preferred his complete liberty. . . . Hope was apt to be rather critical, rather exacting. It would be jolly to see him over here pretty often (Willie had offered him a bed in his chambers this time), and to feel that they were both getting on so well in their different spheres. In fact, as Willie had said to himself several times that night, the world was just going on as well as it possibly could.

His sitting-room, small as it was, looked to him the picture of comfort, with its two, deep, narrow windows, and heavy

curtains. All the furniture was old; but there was a certain mellow richness in the tone of it; in the smoky-brown of the wall-paper; in the inlaid marble chimney-piece; and in the embossed work on the ceiling, which was only a lighter tinge of the universal brown. He thought of the shabby rooms in New Ormond Street, and remembered the squalor of his Paris life, the dirty restaurants, the dinners at eight sous—two sous the *potage*, four sous the *plat*, two sous the *légume;* or those days when he had afforded himself but one restaurant meal a day, and made up with *boudin* (black pudding) and bread, or with herrings and baked potatoes bought for four sous at little windows at the corners of tortuous streets in the Rue du Temple or the Belleville quarters of Paris. One after another, the visions passed by him. How wonderfully hard he had worked in those days! What had sustained him? Somehow, he no longer felt that intense pleasure in the thought of discovering

the Soul of all the Universe that he had felt then. Perhaps he had been a little enthusiastic, a little *tête montée* even, with fasting and hard work. But, anyway, it had been a wonderful effort; something to look back upon with pride. And now he was reaping his reward. . . .

He looked at himself steadfastly in the glass before he undressed, taking stock, as people do, of his strong points. A good tailor could set off his powerful frame to advantage; and then, what a depth of feeling, of poetry, if you looked close, was in his large blue eyes. But when Willie Lancroft got to that point he blushed as if someone had discovered him there before the glass.

. . . . .

It was characteristic of Hope that he had let his cousin see him home, instead of doing the like by Willie. He said "Good-night" and went into the hotel. But he had really no intention of turning into bed. He sallied forth, presently, and walked for hours and hours about

the streets which lie near Covent Garden and the Strand. When his cousin had proposed to come with him, he had welcomed the notion in the hope that Willie might begin to talk about Thyrza Lemoine. But when the subject had come on the tapis, Hope had turned aside from it through his instinct of secretiveness.

"But anyhow," Hope said to himself, "there's no use setting him thinking about her. He certainly took no notice of her in those days; but then no more did I."

Thereupon he began to make up by thinking about Thyrza now, his thoughts eternally returning upon themselves, beating the same hard road. "No more did I. Fool that I was!" and he thought of the proverb: "He that will not when he may." Yet deep at the bottom of his mind, Hope acknowledged to himself that, if Thyrza had remained as she was then, he would have taken no notice of her still. "Never was any one so changed," he said to himself.

He went over to himself again the history of her disappearance—from their paths of life at any rate. That summer after Willie's first visit to Paris, when the artists and art students had dispersed to Barbison or Grès, to Concarneau and Pontavenne, to Normandy and Brittany, or the Loire; when Willie had gone back to prepare his departure from the bank, and Hope, by arrangement with his publishers, had begun a tour through the cathedral towns of French Flanders, Thyrza, for her part, had carried her brother off in quite a different direction. She had got one of her High-Church parsons to come with them, Hope remembered; he was to exercise a wholesome influence over her brother—keep him sober in fact. And out there, in the Jura, or somewhere about, poor Winnstay had died suddenly of Bright's disease, not at all to the surprise of his Paris doctor. After that, Thyrza had gone back to Canada, apparently; anyway, Hope had heard no more of her. It was odd of

her never coming back to say "Good-bye" to any of her old friends. "I swear she behaved awfully badly to me; and yet I believe she rather liked me." And he remembered that even then he had thought of marriage with Thyrza as a not unpleasant possibility one of those days.

And once more he remembered the proverb: "He that will not when he may." "Who could have foreseen the Thyrza of now in the Thyrza of then?" he said once more, with obstinate persistence, determined to find himself an excuse. It would be too maddening otherwise. And the vision of the Thyrza Lemoine of to-day, as he had seen her on the stage and behind the scenes, and last Sunday week, when he had dined with her and her aunt (not alas! with them alone), arose to torture him—the wonderful grace of her movements, and still more the wonderful inflections of her speaking voice. Hope, who really possessed a rather sensitive ear, always

professed a great contempt for any music beyond the music-hall kind—the precise reverse of his cousin, whose sympathetic nature had led him, with very little natural taste for music, to attend for a time popular concerts, and try his best to realize the feelings which they excited in other people; until all he realized was that this was impossible. It was a surprise to Hope, therefore, a delightful-painful surprise, to find how the tones of a human voice merely in speaking could thrill him through and through, as Thyrza's did.

But—but—after all she was not really so much changed. The Thyrza Winnstay of those days had been essentially the same as the Thyrza now. She was really very witty and clever, and very graceful then; though all was overlaid with a certain veneer of primness, suggestive of dowdiness, and in keeping with her High Churchism and all that. Only she had not got those tones in her voice—not that and something else!

Willie had been perfectly satisfied with the fact that Thyrza had changed her name, to avoid giving offence to her father's Puritan relations, and taken the name of her mother. There was nothing strange in that : hundreds and hundreds of actresses did the same. But Hope was of a suspicious nature and he suspected more. He had, too, the French ideas about the stage. Certainly Thyrza had had a history. Hope did not quite acknowledge to himself that this was the change in her (the suspected change), which made all the secret of her attractiveness to him now. It was this very belief which lay at the back of his mind, that all those graceful movements and tender tones meant that Thyrza knew *ce que c'est que l'amour* which made her seem so different to him now from the Thyrza of Paris. But if she had liked him before, why did Thyrza persist now in their relationship of mere friendliness, and entrench herself in her unquestioned position here as an actress acknowledged

charming and received in good society, with her queer old French-Canadian aunt Mrs. Lemoine at her side. Would she always be like that? or had he only to wait? or—Oh! God, it was a torture to think of it—did she accord favours to others, to any other, which were denied to him?

It was this last thought that now (as always) dwelt with Hope the longest, and set him beating the pavement with his feet hour after hour. With a fiendish ingenuity of suspiciousness, his mind called up and reviewed every circumstance which could be tortured into evidence in favour of this damning theory; how bright her eyes had looked when somebody spoke to her; what a thrill there was in her voice another time; how this man had been talking eagerly to her in a corner, while her hand picked at a bouquet that had been thrown to her—an assignation no doubt. To him she always kept the manner of an old friend and no more. And yet—yes, even

for him there were exasperatingly sweet inflections in her voice, exasperatingly attractive poses of her body, leaning against a window as she talked, bending over her aunt. She was doing all she could to draw him on. Was that a commonplace coquetry, was it only revenge for former neglect? Or did she quite intend to yield in her own time—perhaps to-morrow, perhaps next day? His imagination spared him no details. "O God! I'll never do harm to a single person in the course of my life, if You grant me this," he said, making, against his reason, one of those quaint prayers, to which sinners of this kind are prone. (For there is a curious and close connection between Love—in whatever form—and Religion; and of all abolished shrines certainly those once dedicated to Aphroditê have left the greatest blank in modern life.) Perhaps that *was* the explanation. It would not do to offend her. He must wait—if possible. But, O God! what torture. And then. . .

Hour after hour would these thoughts surge through Hope's mind. Sometimes they left him almost hysterical and void of self-control. As is the case with the majority of Englishmen, his *amours* had hitherto been of a tolerably rough-and-ready kind, making small demands on his powers to attract the other sex. And, because this had been his only experience, Hope had imagined that he looked down upon that sex and could get on well enough without having to care whether he attracted it or not. Now he felt very differently. He was more like a stammering schoolboy than a man, when he was with Miss Lemoine. It was impossible to believe that he was himself. And those other fellows, fellows like Warthorpe, who were so much at their ease! But no woman could care for a mask like that. "You can't tell: women, especially when they get into public life, are governed by no rules." How he hated those grinning fools.

How he hated everybody. He had

been nearly crying out with rage this very night at the club to hear those fellows, Willie amongst them, talking such twaddle and thinking it clever! "Damn them! Damn them! Damn them!"

So different may be the aspect of the same surroundings to two different minds.

## CHAPTER VI.

Two nights later, Willie, who did not go very much into society, happened to be at a crush, and while engaged in making his way up the staircase, his heart gave an impulsive throb which surprised even himself. He attributed it partly to the heat and the exertion : but he recognized that it was partly due to the surprise of seeing just before him the full figure of Lady Featherstone, and her taller daughter beside her. They were just turning the angle on to the landing, and, when they had reached it, Ela, looking round, recognized and nodded to her new acquaintance.

"I've written to ask my cousin for Thursday next," she said, speaking down to him.

"Oh, I've met Mr. Featherstone, the night before last, Willie answered.

"Oh, really!" A shade of disappointment passed over Ela's face. It was always so difficult to get hold of Maitland.

Willie with masculine vanity misinterpreted the expression. "But I hope I may come all the same," he said.

"Oh, I hope you will, of course."

Lady Featherstone, who had turned round, greeted him in rather an absent-minded way.

"Is that Lady Mary Gauge?" she said to her daughter, feeling for her glasses. "Who has she got with her?"

They were carried off after a moment, and Willie saw Ela speaking to one person after another. He himself knew scarcely anybody, and he began to doubt whether the finger of Providence had had so much to do with bringing him there that evening, as, ten minutes earlier, he had thought. He made a great circuit, was buttonholed by a distin-

guished Professor of Botany, and for a while kept up a conversation with him on the last speech of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. They both knew that they were talking chiefly for the sake of not standing silent and solitary in the midst of this crowd; but they exerted themselves to appear interested in what they said, while around them flowed rivulets of conversation which belonged more properly to the occasion.

"Rather a squash, eh?"

"Dreadful, isn't it?"

"I suppose you're going on to Gore House?"

"Yes. Soon, I hope. It can't be so hot as here."

"Give me a dance, will you? How do you do, Lady Victoria. Didn't see you first moment."

"Pleasure."

"All right. First waltz after twelve."

. . . . .

"How do, Fred? What's brought you here, old man?"

"What's brought you, if you come to that?"

"Oh, I've got my sister in tow somewhere. Deuce knows where she's got to, though. It's lookin' for a needle in a bottle of hay, tryin' to get hold of anyone here. I say, will you come on to my quarters after this?"

"Can't: I've just promised Miss Palliser a dance at Gore House."

"What did you do that for? There's a ball at Nellie Staunton's to-night."

"Is there?"

"Rather. Tom's going to take Kitty Stevens, and I've promised to bring Bella Leslie. You'd better turn up."

"Oh, I'll turn up all right later on, and take my chance."

. . . . .

"I bowed to that young man, but I've not the faintest idea who he is."

. . . . .

And such is the influence of surroundings, that both of the two men, who were discussing the Chancellor of the Ex-

chequer's speech, felt that they would have had more self-respect if they had been joining in scraps of conversation such as these.

Willie passed a little further, and heard a mother say to her daughter—a girl with lovely beseeching eyes,—

"Martha, who's that old gentleman coming towards's? I'm sure I know his face."

"Why, mimma! it's Sir Gregory Foote."

"No! Is it now? Well, I thought I knew him."

"Ghood evening, Lady Blaine. Sure and that's not Miss Martha?" said a hale red-faced man, with refined features and very bushy whiskers, as he held out his hand.

"Yes, it is, though," said the mother, beaming all over.

"And y're bringing her here to conquer the hearts of the English. I was just wondering whether I was going to

see a pretty face all the evening, and now I'm satisfied."

> "Have ye sane bonny Leslie?
> As she came o'er the borr-der
> She's gane, like Aluxander,
> To spread her conquests furr-ther."

He repeated the verse with so much gusto, that one or two people turned round to look at him.

"Sure, I forgot I was at an English party," he said, with a comical look, like that of a schoolboy reproved. "Mum's the word here."

"And d'ye stay long in England, Sir Gregory?"

"Not I. I've just come over with me son Tom to help him get his outfit, and take him to see the Juke. That's all I'm here for," and he heaved a sigh and his face became suddenly overclouded. "He's here somewhere about, is Tom," he added.

"Are ye going to lose him, then, this autumn?" said Lady Blaine.

"Yes. He's going to Inja in the

autumn. His uncle, General O'Grady's been good enough to nominate him on his staff," said Sir Gregory, with almost exaggerated cheerfulness.

Willie moved on. Tears came suddenly into his eyes at this vision of simple and natural friendliness, where all the rest seemed grimacing and affectation. And, by chance, a picture arose in his mind of a visit he had once paid, in the far East End, to the house of a Radical Agitator, and of the artisan's wife, coming from the back room, wiping the suds from her round arms and beaming friendliness on him and his companion. Her, "Well, you must take me as you find me," had a faint touch of brogue in it, not unlike Lady Blaine's accent, and withal as Wordsworth says, "the very sound of courtesy."

"There are a few real ladies left in all societies," he said to himself.

But all these thoughts disappeared as rapidly as they had come, when he contrived once more to approach Miss

Featherstone. As soon as he was near enough to be spoken to, she turned round to him of her own accord, and his doubts about a Special Providence vanished at once.

"This is pleasanter than having to talk over the heads of half-a-dozen people."

"I suspect you often talk over the heads of people," Willie said.

"Thank you, yours *par exemple*, I suppose."

"Yes, mine as much as anybody else's."

"That's the pride that apes humility. . . . Well, wonders will never cease," she added, looking over Willie's shoulder in a way that made him turn round. Maitland Featherstone had just reached his side.

"Am I the pride that apes humility, or the ape that prides humility?" he said. (Ela frowned a little. She did not like Maitland to make allusions to his rather monkey-like face.). . . "No, I'm not

going to shake hands that way," her cousin went on.

"How silly you are! There, then."

"How do you do, Mr. Lancroft? Have you noticed the curious way ladies have taken to shaking hands, by turning up the backs? It has a mystic meaning connected with the old Roman 'habet.'"

"And what did that mean?" said Ela.

"Let him be given to the lions. Mr. Lancroft's one of the lions here to-night."

"That's rather a hard thing to say," said Willie.

"Is that Aunt Marion?" said Maitland, and moved off to speak to Lady Featherstone.

"Would you tell me," the latter said, "who that is talking to Ela? She introduced him to me. Mr. Lanfrank I think his name is. He's a friend of yours, isn't he?"

"H'm, yes a friend of mine," said Maitland. "Lan*croft's* his name. He's also a very rising author, if that's any interest."

"Oh, really! He writes books! He looks a little like an actor, don't you think? Now tell me, Maitland, I can't remember whether we are coming to Blythe Wood this autumn or not. I know your dear mother asked us for some time; but I can't remember whether it was before Christmas or not."

"Why, certainly you are, Aunt Marion: you promised to come in August. I'm not going to let you off, you and Ela. I've got a lot of swells coming."

"You mean clever people, I suppose," Lady Featherstone said, rather coldly. "But you know I'm not clever."

"Oh, tell that to the Horse Marines, aunt?" Maitland always adopted a rather slangy tone in talking to his Aunt Marion. "When's Uncle Proby coming back?"

"Some time before the end of the year, I hope. Really, I think I must be making a move," she added, looking across towards Ela.

Willie enjoyed, meantime, a few minutes'

talk with Miss Featherstone, which seemed to him long afterwards fraught with interest, though an auditor would not have been able to distinguish it from twenty other talks, which were going on in the same rooms at the same moment. For they all turned on the same things, the last party where the interlocutors had met, the last new novel, the last new play. This final subject was *Léonie*, in which Miss Lemoine acted the heroine. Willie had been to see her only the night before.

"Didn't you think her very delightful?" said Ela.

"Yes; in a way, certainly. Any amount of grace but no passion, I think I should say," said Willie.

"I think I care more for grace than passion, then," said his companion. "I suppose you would say that Hamling has passion, would not you? I can't say I like him."

"I certainly shouldn't say he had grace," Willie said, smiling. "Really

he's not passion either, but he has something all the same. Real poetical feeling, I think, that's it—yes, and pathos too. I think that's his strong point. Have you ever heard him in Othello say that passage about being declined into the vale of years?

> 'Or for I am declined
> Into the vale of years—yet that's not much.' "

"Don't you think," said Ela, "that it was almost wicked of Shakespeare to write that play?"

"No! Why?"

"Because — because everything goes wrong so very unluckily. I always think —feel as if there was something rather wrong in making things worse than they really are."

"Well, Ela, I think we ought to be going," said Lady Featherstone.

"Yes; there's something in that," Willie answered, rather strangely.

"Thank you," said Lady Featherstone, laughing; the sense that she had been rather sharp made her good-natured.

"You'll come and see us some day, I hope, Mr. Lancroft," she said.

. . . . .

"Yes; that's very true," Willie was saying to himself as he went home. "One has no right to represent the world as if it were governed by evil demons, as Shelley thought. . . . Women have a keener religious sense than men. . . . What's so jolly about her," he went on rather irrelevantly, "is that she's so frank. You can see her character at once. She's like her cousin—exceedingly simple, and clever at the same time!" (For Maitland was a man with a reputation.)

This was a good deal to have discovered in one afternoon and one evening.

## CHAPTER VII.

"What do you want going out to those swell parties?" said Hope, suddenly, to his cousin, one Sunday, a week or two later.

They were in evening dress and were walking across the park. Hope spoke, not for the sake of playing the mentor, but because his nerves were in a state of tension. But, absorbed as his interests were in his own passion, Hope's quick habits of observation had, as it were, of themselves pieced together something of Willie's recent doings and feelings.

"Oh," said his cousin, stammering a little, "I—I—I like to see all sorts of people."

"But to see those people once is to see all there is to show. There's nothing inside, and they're all alike."

"Now, how can you tell, when you profess never to go into Society at all?"

"I didn't know I said so. I never make any professions. It's the safest plan. Rot! never go out! I've done that sort of thing—over there. I go to the British Embassy if I like. Lord Lyson thinks a lot of me."

"Well; do you mean that he's just like anybody else?"

"He's different. He's only smart because he was born so."

"Well, I'm looking forward to my dinner, to-night," Willie said, good-naturedly. "In a way," he added, after reflection, "though I think theatrical people are much more monotonous than any other set of beings."

This might have sounded like a malicious rejoinder, for they were on their way to dine with Thyrza Lemoine. But it was really quite an inoffensive one on Willie's part.

Hope had cast one keen glance at him; but when he saw how innocent he was of

an intention to give offence he only laughed, and his nerves were quieted.

"What a fool I am!" he thought. "Let him stick to his swells. I wish beasts like Warthorpe and Clumber would do the same."

. . . . .

To Willie's unbiassed judgment it was one of the prettiest dinners in which he had ever taken part. The room in which they dined opened almost the whole of one side upon the shady garden; only the gauze curtains spread themselves between them and it. It was not like a room in the middle of London; but, to Willie's imagination, had a touch of the Lucullan, or the Horatian, villa about it, in that warm night, with the bright light from within shining on dark masses of foliage outside. All was well appointed and comfortable and on this side of extravagance; except perhaps the wine which was unnecessarily good and plentiful for their little party of eight—Mrs. and Miss Lemoine, the hostesses; Bryan

Kennedy and his wife, both actors; and for a fourth woman, but first in consideration, Julia Reed, the magnificent actress, for the sake of whose talent Society had agreed that though her sins were as scarlet, she should be regarded as white as snow. Warthorpe and the two Lancrofts made up the number. Here again, of the two, Willie was most to the front. Julia Reed had read him and was gracious. Illustrated books may have been in her line, but she never thought about the illustrators of them. Thyrza seemed to be in a vein to lay stress on her social successes; and she had met Willie at one or two "things" of late. But to the object of this notice it all seemed too unnatural to be anything but a show. The women talked in a tone of sprightliness and friendliness which struck him as utterly unreal; and words and phrases were bandied about which had no meaning for him.

At last it became wearisome, and he made an attempt to go early; but

Thyrza laid an affectionate hand on his arm.

"You mustn't go yet, really, M. Willi," she said, in a charming, half-foreign voice. "This is the first time that we three students have been together. Did you know," she said to Julia Reed, "that I and the two great Mr. Lancrofts were all three art students in Paris together?"

This was the first occasion on which, in Willie's presence, she had alluded to that time.

"You were studying art in Paris, Mr. Lancroft?" said Julia.

Willie only shook his head, smiling, for Thyrza had gone on,—

"But you must bear me witness that I was much the youngest," she said; "or I should be giving myself away too much."

"Of course you were; no kid, as they say," Hope said. "I know your age precisely, though," he continued.

"What a dangerous person!" said Mrs. Kennedy.

"No, I'm not dangerous yet; but I shall be some day," Hope said.

He had felt himself turn pale when Thyrza put her hand on Willie's arm, and knew that anyone observing closely would see that the smile on his lips had become fixed and unnatural. It was only to be hoped Julia Reed had *not* seen it. It was monstrous to be such an ass; but it was stronger than he was.

And after the others had gone, when he and Willie and Thyrza were smoking one final cigarette—she paid them this compliment, having refused to smoke after dessert when the other two women did so—his temper got the better of him once more, merely because Warthorpe's name came on the *tapis*.

"Well," said Willie, as they drew their easy chairs into a semi-circle, while Madame Lemoine had retired a little to the back, "I must say I feel more at my ease now your friend Warthorpe is gone."

"What's the matter with him?" said

Thyrza, speaking designedly to provoke Hope; "he's a man, same as another. They're mostly very stupid."

"Man!" said Hope, "he's a miserable grinning monkey. Those sort of Johnnies are the most sickening creatures I know. They go about London saying always the same things. Then they go off to Homburg or Switzerland, see the same people there, and say the same things to them. Then they go to Cannes or Monte Carlo, stay in just the same sort of hotels they stayed in at Homburg, see just the same people again and say the same things all over once more. What's really funny about them is that they fancy all the time that they know a lot about the world. I should like to make them take a trip to America in the steerage, as I had to do the first time I went there, or live awhile in Paris on thirty sous a day. That would make them sit up, you bet. Why," he turned suddenly upon Thyrza with his old domineering manner, "you know a lot more about the world than a

chap like that can teach you. Only you don't like to own up to it."

"Why wouldn't I like to own up to it?" said Thyrza, coldly.

But her eyes had a glow of resentment in them; and when they went away she said "good-bye" to Willie much more cordially than she did to Hope.

The latter felt sick and faint when he left the house.

"There, I've done it again. Thrown away a chance when I had one. I can't *stand* seeing her make up to other chaps. It turns me positively sick, I swear it does. And I can't stand this suspense. I must do something positive. . . ."

Thus he went on to himself, the dreary round of plans and counter-plans, resolutions and counter-resolutions crowding through his brain. He felt as if he had been hours in torture before the little garden gate had shut upon them, and his cousin's voice came upon him like a voice from another world.

"Well," said Willie, "that's a very

pleasant sort of party to go to every now and then, but those sort of people would bore me in the long run."

"Why should they bore you?" Hope turned round, almost fiercely. "You could not easily find anyone so clever as Julia Reed or Thyrza Lemoine."

"Yes, Thyrza's clever, certainly. I always thought she was clever, and a very good actress up to a certain point. But I don't understand all their talk about 'lines' and 'situations' and that sort of thing," said Willie, rather peevishly.

"That's such *rot!*" said Hope. "You can't expect to understand anybody's business or work the first time you hear them talk about it. It took you long enough to get into the talk of artists and that sort of thing, and of course I took some time before I knew the literary *argot*."

(Willie noticed the difference between the "It took you long enough" and "took me some time." Those assumptions of

superiority were ingrained in Hope; but he began to resent them.)

"Yes, but there's a difference," he said, testily. "Acting isn't a definite art like painting and writing."

"Why not, I should like to know?"

"Because it's only an art of interpretation."

"What else is landscape painting and portrait painting?"

"There is a difference. Besides, acting is such rubbish, a mass of conventionalities and stage tricks."

"And what is any sort of Society but a mass of conventionalism and stage tricks?" said Hope, feeling happier now he had "drawn" his cousin. "You like living along with the smarts, that's it; just the dullest and most conventional set of people in the whole world, taking them as a class."

"Well, so does Thyrza for that matter, or Julia Reed, or any of them. They all like going among the smarts much more than I do."

It was a purely accidental thrust. But in a moment the doors of the house of torment opened once more for Hope. What a selfish beggar this Willie was! What a miserable beggar he was! He wished he could open his heart to anyone. But he had never acknowledged any weakness. . . . Least of all before this cousin of his. . . . And then if it all went right how he should hate to have told. . . . It would be giving Thyrza away, herself. Perhaps it would all come right. . . .

. . . . .

Another week passed by and Hope seemed no nearer the attainment of his desires. Even a person, so full of whimsicalities and concealments as he was, could not help letting something of his troubles appear in his face and in his conduct. Edith had at first welcomed his return to London with delight. For all the Battersby Lancrofts were proud of Hope now. It was wonderful too of him to stay on and on in London as he was doing.

Until this time, a fortnight or three weeks had been the limit of his visits to his native land. Now he had been here two months. But of late Hope had scarcely been to see his sister, until at last she wrote an urgent note and got him to come to luncheon one Sunday.

Edith had altered a good deal. The great, unrecognized change which takes place in most domestic lives, stealing on as silently and as inevitably as age or death, had come to her household. Her husband had ceased to be in love with her. He was in all respects a model husband; was, too, getting on better at the Bar than had been expected of him. He came home each day just in time for an eight o'clock dinner, and scarcely saw his four little children except on Sundays.

One of the old Miss Harwoods, his great-aunts, had died, and he was ten thousand pounds the richer for her death, and so, in spite of their increasing family, the Bernard Harwoods now lived in a good house in Porchester Place. Edith

had grown fatter, and was more than of old occupied by her domestic cares, the chief of which (as with ninety-nine out of every hundred London housewives) was the care to make their income of two thousand a year do duty for four thousand.

"No," said Hope, drily, in answer to his sister, "we don't meet very often, do we?"

"What's the matter with you, Hope?" Edith said. "You're getting most awfully *farouche*, do you know? People are beginning to talk about you, especially since that new edition of Willie's book came out. But you won't go into Society. Lady Tremaine was talking about you the other day to me, and saying that she had heard people say that the drawings were quite equal to the book itself."

"Oh, Lord, what fools they are! Fancy my coming out at this time of day under Willie's wing," said Hope.

"Well, I don't like his stories at all.

But they are popular, you can't deny that," said Edith.

She felt resentment on her brother's behalf that Willie's name should be most in men's mouths. And it seemed unnatural too ; when the Battersbys had for years stood so much higher in the estimation of the world than the Speilbys. Why could not Hope distance Willie as completely as she had distanced poor Carry, or Charlie, the High-school teacher ?

" You've no idea how much Willie gets asked out," she said, in a tone of sympathetic discontent.

Hope went away more than ever out of humour with himself and all that belonged to him. He would never have acknowledged that he was responsible for the change in Edith's life and character. But deep down his conscience pricked him.

" By God ! If she wants me to marry her, I'll do it," was the seemingly inconsequent reflection that he made as he was leaving Edith's door.

And, in a sudden mood of *attendrissement* and of terror at the thought of a world from which love was banished, he once more made that strange prayer :

"If You'll grant me this, I'll never do anyone any harm as long as I live."

. . . . .

A few days later a hired brougham left the stage door of the Society Theatre, and directed its way up Wellington Street and Bow Street. When it debouched into New Oxford Street the coachman was hailed by a man in dress clothes and overcoat. There was no reason why he should have stopped, but he did so. Perhaps there had been some previous transaction between the two. He stopped a moment, and the gentleman seized the opportunity of opening the carriage door and getting in.

It was Hope. Thyrza was alone, as he had known beforehand that he should find her. At the moment that he got into the carriage he thought less of the virtuous resolution that he had made

when he left Edith's, not many days before.

"Only this once," he said, as he sat down beside Thyrza; and, what appears a suspicious circumstance, the coachman drove off again without further inquiry.

Thyrza gave a start; but she had not precisely lost her presence of mind; she had recognized Hope, and it was only to gain time that she said, "Who is it? . . . How can you! What a shame it is!" she went on, "you know what will be said; and Roberts is sure to talk."

"I said only this once, Thyrza."

"You've no right to call me Thyrza."

"Yes; an old friend has rights. . . . Only this once," and, as he said this, Hope placed his hand upon hers. His heart seemed to stop still: for the rest of his life he remembered the half-sticky sensation of the kid hand that he held, and the touch of the swansdown cloak against his wrist. "I can't go on like this! Have a little pity! You know I love you like mad!"

Would that clenched hand relax the least bit? The worth of a kingdom seemed to depend upon the answer.

"Oh, it's real mean of you, taking advantage of me like this, and doing all you can to do me harm when I'm getting on for once," Thyrza said. There was a note of tears in her voice. They were in reality no more than tears of vexation.

"For once?" said Hope, forgetting himself. Thyrza had of late appeared such a triumphant being to him.

Thyrza saw that he was lost.

"Well, I've had a hard life since I was in Paris. You don't suppose a girl gets on directly, on the stage or anywhere else. And . . . we . . . lost all our money. And I haven't got a . . . friend . . . in the world . . . now . . . you . . . turn . . . against me. . . ." She had taken out her pocket-handkerchief and pressed it to her eyes.

"But, Thyrza . . . I'll be . . . I didn't mean . . . I want . . ."

"You think, because . . . I look gay and . . . that, that I'm feeling gay all the time. But you might think . . . what a girl feels like when she's lost just the only relative, let alone an aunt, she had in the world . . ." and she sobbed as she came to the end of her sentence.

Hope now utterly disbelieved in those "favours accorded to others," of which from time to time his jealousy had convinced him.

"I'll get out if you like," he said, penitently.

"Yes, do."

"But it can't do any harm my staying a minute more. I don't believe you care a bit for me, and I—hang it—I can't express what I feel; you know that. But I *do* care about you most awfully. Why should't you marry me, Thyrza?"

"Oh, do go now; you don't know what harm you're doing to me. I can't think, I can't answer."

"Then I'll come and see you tomorrow. Indeed, Thyrza, I'm very sorry

if I've done any harm. But I don't see . . ."

"Oh, yes, you have, you have indeed. But . . . but I know you mean to be kind," and she gave his hand a little pressure.

What Hope said to himself when he could think, was, "Well, it's turned out quite different from what I intended. But I don't mind."

Thyrza's grace of body and suave tones no longer had for him the least relation to any past history, nor yet to her public life. They were simply the personal belongings of the most enchanting creature he had ever met—Hope was quite decided upon that now—one to whom it would be a happiness to devote a whole existence.

A few hours before, he had instinctively thought of Thyrza's life, as people think of women's lives that are passed much before the public, as having no intimate side, no emotions of great strength or depth. It had seemed to him natural

that an actress should have *amours*. But it did not seem to him necessary that she should have a craving for *love*, not less imperative than that which may come to any human being. Hope did not express the change in his views in quite these words, which he would have regarded as sentimental; but he began to think of Thyrza after a new fashion.

A few tears had accomplished all this. Hope was proud of his strength—proud of that above all things that he possessed. It was through his strength—no one aiding him—that he had changed all his life, and found for himself a career. And that strength was continually being called into service and being displayed, in his intercourse with his fellow-creatures, in his bargains with his publishers, in his mastery over his technique, in his management of light and shade. A great painter, painting for years a mighty subject, and never realizing more than half his conception, may feel his weakness rather than his strength: a lesser artist,

continually accomplishing fresh work, comes to think himself invincible.

Thyrza too, was strong for a woman. She, too, had made a career for herself, as Hope reflected. But it must have been hard work; "Not gay all the time," as she said, by any means. Why had he never thought of that before? "I will add strength to strength," Hope said to himself, smiling, as a vision of All-Syston Church and his father in the reading-desk rose before his mind. She was strong for a woman; but how utterly weak compared to him. What joy to be her supporter; he would devote his life to it.

Thyrza's reflections were not much in key with what Hope was imagining for her.

"How easily you can turn a man round your finger!" was the first but scarcely recognized thought. "How little I knew that in the old Paris days. Hope Lancroft appeared such a hero then. But I will not have all the past brought up

again. . . . I have sworn never to think of *that*, and I won't. Oh! why didn't you marry me before, in Paris long ago! I should have been a good wife then! Ah! . . ." (The thought of *then* and all its possibilities—infinite always are the possibilities of then—came back with a sharp stab.) "Well, anyhow, my engagement lasts only another fortnight. And I'm to play 'Juliet' at St. John's: that's something to look forward to. I wonder if he would follow me out there? Yes, he's sure to. I must get it over as well as I can. Poor dear fellow! Yes, I think I almost do love him still in a way."

. . . . .

And the result was that the early afternoon of the second day found Hope, for the first time, left alone with Thyrza and with a "free hand." But, as always happens, the whole turn of affairs went differently from what he had anticipated, what he had rehearsed to himself twenty times.

Thyrza was so frank and unembarrassed and friendly, that they appeared like an evil dream, those days when she had seemed to have concealments from him, to want to draw him on, yet hold him off. Could all those troubles be the outcome of his own suspicious, self-torturing nature? and was all going to end as simply and happily as marriage-bells? Hope had now long got past any hesitation about the bonds of matrimony. He felt he was going to begin a new existence, a virtuous, happy, domestic one, and, as he said, "Never do any harm to anyone henceforth."

"Oh, Thyrza," he said, in a way that surprised himself, "how nice you are to-day!"

Thyrza who was standing up, smiled down at him like an elder sister.

"I said the other night that you had no right to call me Thyrza. That was silly of me. We are such old friends, aren't we, and you used to be so good to . . . poor . . . Paul," and tears gathered in

her eyes. Hope would have liked to kiss them away. It must come to that soon.

He got up and took the hand which she had made a half motion to hold out to him.

"You must be awfully lonely now, Thyrza . . ." he began. She had shaken hands, but she did not leave her hand in his, and when she withdrew it the sentence came to a pause.

"Of course I miss Paul very much," she said, gravely, but not tragically. "But still, I must say I like my life. And if I can keep one or two real friends . . . ." And she looked at him with frank eyes.

"But I told you, Thyrza," Hope said, strangely embarrassed and blushing (He was thinking of the thoughts which he had once had about her, and which, as they had separated from him now so utterly, might perhaps have taken voices to themselves, be about to speak from the air) "that . . . I loved you. . . It isn't as a friend. . ."

A shade crossed Thyrza's frank face.

"Oh, don't talk like that," she said, her voice growing hard. "Everybody pretends to be in love with me. I know what that means. . . That's where I have to suffer from being left alone," she added in her pathetic contralto voice.

"What a fool I was to say that," she thought, immediately.

"But I mean it. . . You seem as if you couldn't believe one," Hope added, as the hard look returned to her face. "It's because you're alone . . . that . . . I want. . ."

"No," said Thyrza, throwing up her head and giving it a little shake in a manner peculiarly her own. "I just hate to hear anything about 'love' (she pronounced the word with a sort of scorn). I want to have a friend, a real friend."

"But, indeed, Thyrza, I do love you as much as anybody possibly could. And I'll be your friend as well. Oh, it's right down idiotic talking like that!" Hope went on, impatiently; and Thyrza

almost smiled to herself in recognizing how he had unconsciously gone back five years at least in his manner—and even for the moment in his character—reverting to the Americanisms, which had been a second nature to him in those days.

"Be my friend first," said she.

"What do you mean by that? I know you don't believe me; and I can't talk sentiment. I never could. But if you marry me, Thyrza, you'll have the best time that anybody possibly could have. We're suited right away. . ."

"No! you must be my friend first," she said, holding on to the phrase as to a sheet anchor.

. . . . .

When he had gone, she sank down upon a sofa and turned deadly pale. It had been a supreme effort. It might seem severe to say it had been a supreme piece of acting. But is not all life almost a piece of acting more or less? However, she had gained the exact point she wished to gain. "It would have made me real

bad to have quarrelled with Hope," she said to herself. "And yet I would like to have told him everything. I suppose I must some day."

And once more she reflected how easy it is to tame those wolves of men and draw their teeth. And bitterly she said to herself, why does Providence withhold such knowledge from us till it is too late?

## CHAPTER VIII.

THE season had passed. July, which had this year been thundery and unsettled, had given place to a fine August. The sun burnt with tropical heat in the middle of the day. But, in the early mornings, mists hung heavy and low over the meadows; and the heads of the reeds, along the dykes, took sometimes the likeness of brown planks or narrow rafts floating upon the waters.

Willie used to see this sight, when, very early, he looked out of his window from the Laurels at Speilby St. Peter's, his mother's house: and, again, in the mellow evenings there descended a lighter mist, which hung over the dark green meadows, while far away the hill

country turned to a deep indigo. That hill country contained Battersby. While he was still a child—when the Godfrey Lancrofts first became the "Battersbys"—that hill country had come to have for him a certain association of hostility. It meant the world: while their own country, the utterly flat land in which Speilby lay, symbolized an Arcadian peace.

This feeling came once more strongly upon Willie, now that he was down at Speilby, this August. He felt more like a schoolboy than he had done for years. All the excitement of London, of his authorship, of his success, had left him like a dream. With one or both of his sisters—for Charlie had her holiday too—he wandered about this beautiful level country, or sailed upon the wide level sea.

. . . . .

"How jolly it is being here," he said. He was lying at the bottom of Tom Nunn's boat, holding the mainsheet; and over his head the brown mainsail seemed

to tower high into the air. A glowing richness of colour from the hot sun was behind it, and the pale blue sky, streaked with white dashes of cloud, was infinitely far overhead. With a return of faithfulness to his old principle of life—a principle which had been sadly in abeyance of late—Willie Lancroft allowed his mind to concentrate itself on the scene before him; on the effect of Charlie at the helm, standing out against the white horizon; on the alternating swish and gurgle of the water close to his ears —sounds as of some unseen party of babbling children called to order by their nurse; on the wonderful spiritual sensation of looking straight upwards and seeing the mast of the cutter pointing to the heavens. . .

Charlie, from her place, looking on her brother's face in the rich shadow of the sail, thought what a superhumanly beautiful, superhumanly clever man he was, and made her vows for the time when (as Providence seemed to have decreed) they were to live

together, and be all in all to one another. Little did she imagine that, as an unconscious element in her brother's perfect peace and happiness, entered the fact that this visit to Speilby was to be followed by his visit to Blythe Wood—the home of the Maitland Featherstones—where he knew Ela Featherstone would be staying at the same time.

They sailed far out, till the sandhills and the sea beach blended together into a low drab bank. At one point, an eye, as practised as theirs were, could just detect above the bank a touch of dark green, which represented the tops of some of the trees round Speilby Abbey; *their* trees no longer. This was all that connected them with the world of men, save indeed one or two other companion sails upon the white waters, and, to the north, a line of smoke from some steamer beyond the horizon.

Anon Charlie changed the course a point, the sail swung round, and now he could see the houses of a little fishing

village away down the coast, only it seemed to have grown bigger.

"Did you say Tom Nunn wanted us to leave the boat at Griddlethorpe?" Willie said. "That's rather a bore."

"Yes, it is rather a bore," said Carry, looking round from her side of the boat in the direction her brother's eyes had taken. "You know they are making a watering-place of Griddlethorpe. You can see the new row of red houses, 'Sea-View Terrace' it is called, that was built last spring. They've made an esplanade and everything." She could distinguish what was to Willie only a confused blur.

"It's disgusting," said her brother.

"Yes, isn't it?" said Charlie.

"The only advantage is," said Carry, "that there are more trains than there used to be. So, if we bring the boat back after four, we shall get a train very handy; and it is convenient for shopping sometimes.

"H'm," Willie grunted and lay back.

He was determined to think of nothing disagreeable; and this new watering-place struck a strangely discordant note. We all of us think that the world of our childhood is always waiting for us unchanged, a last refuge should we fail in the battle of life. We have only got to retire to that peaceful land and wait for death there. Nothing could have been farther from Willie's habitual train of thought at that time than any notion of defeat and retirement; but in moments that seem fullest of success and hope, strange monitory voices will come. It seemed, therefore, a deep injury to him that human vulgarity should have begun to intrude upon his ancient and reserved rights. But he resolutely dragged himself away from the subject. . .

"Your fame has reached the smoky north," Charlie said, from her tiller. "In fact, I suppose it was partly that that got me the mistressship at Hilstone."

What a wonderful person Charlie was, to be always so plucky and in such good

spirits! "I wish she could have a better time," Willie thought to himself.

Nor did his sisters' pleasure in the day suffer any diminution when they ran the boat into Griddlethorpe harbour and landed on the new esplanade. There was a merry-go-round, grinding and jangling, where the esplanade abutted on the sandhills; on the opposite side of the tiny bay was a photographer's shed; three bathing-machines were drawn above high-water mark; and on the shore were about twenty or thirty people in flannels of diverse colours and in wondrous hats, the greater portion grouped round a man who had three dogs performing on the beach.

"*Stant littore* puppies," said Charlie, who was strong in Latin now; and she laughed the same free, joyous laugh that belonged to their old days in Ormond Street.

"You're a literary puppy," said her brother, with as much *verve* as he could put into his voice; for the sight had struck a chill upon him somehow.

"There are one or two things I should like to get at Billing's, if you would not mind, while we go to the station. It's half an hour yet before the train goes," Carry said.

"Do you know that Griddlethorpe is Godric's-thorpe, and that Battersby is Begseg's-by?" said Charlie, "and that they are called . . ."

"Oh! Battersby—Begseg's-by is very old hat . . ."

"Very old what?"

"Very old *hat*. You must have heard that expression a hundred times. A chestnut, then!"

"A chestnut's an old joke, I thought."

"So it is. This is old hat, an old story. Old Fuller, who was at Speilby St. James's, when I was a little kid, went to Battersby before Uncle Godfred came there. But you were such a kid, one forgets that: I daresay you hardly remember old Fuller?"

"Oh, I *do* remember him. Usen't you to think for years and years that the 'Old

Fuller' people talked about in books was the same?"

"Of course I did. I went with Catherine to see him at Battersby and he made me. . . . Oh! here you are. Done all you want? I'll catch on to some of those parcels."

And they went back third class very pleasantly and merrily.

## CHAPTER IX.

It was nearly the end of August when Willie Lancroft paid his second visit. When he went down into Lincolnshire, his eyes had eagerly noted every feature of the country which he passed through. But this time he had a novel of Yeyla's to read—the great French novelist. It was an advance copy of a forthcoming book sent him, with the signature of the great Yeyla himself, whom Willie, through Hope, had got to know in Paris. Yeyla had been good enough to express admiration of one or two of his tales, and had paid him in addition the real compliment of transferring one or two things from them to his own work.

A dogcart met Willie at the station;

and, through the Worcestershire lanes bordered with elms and hung with hops and with bryony beginning to turn black, he was bowled along till he reached the lodge gates; then through some park-like meadows, till, suddenly, without premonition, he found himself in the drive close to the front door. He had passed through no sort of avenue—but that was because the way to the station did not take him along the only avenue there was—and he had had no preparation before he reached the long white house of Blythe Wood. At the first glance, the house seemed no larger than some country rectories. The more unpretentious everything seemed, the happier he felt.

Mrs. Featherstone, Maitland's mother, was a French woman, daughter of D'Adalbert, the great astronomer. Maitland's father had been a distinguished astronomer also. The son was a not less distinguished mathematician (senior wrangler of his year) and a chemist. He had, two years ago, when he was still only thirty-

eight, received the honour of election to the Royal Society; and two years earlier than that his work on Capillary Attraction had established his reputation. With this, he had been engaged ever since he took his degree, or earlier. It was probable, Maitland's friends thought, that this would about sum up the efforts of his life; or, at any rate, that he would be content with the task of revising and perfecting his experiments, and the publication now and then of a brochure on this and allied subjects which touched both physics and chemistry. For Maitland had many claims upon him. He was not only a man of science. His position as the head of a family brought him more or less into contact with the fashionable world; and the reputation of his father and grandfather—in supplement to his own abilities—opened out to him the most distinguished society of both capitals—even fashionable French society as well as English, if he had desired it; for D'Adalbert was a viscomte as well as

an astronomer, and Mrs. Featherstone had relatives in the Faubourg. All her associations and interests, however, as those of her son, were with academicians and men of science and letters.

Willie had half an hour's chat with Mrs. Featherstone on his arrival; but he saw none of the guests until dinner-time; and, when he came into the drawing-room, he had chiefly a confused sense of unknown faces, until he was told off to take in a very pretty but very delicate-looking girl with Irish eyes. The first quarter of an hour of dinner, moreover, only had the effect of making him feel estranged from his fellow-guests, who had topics of the day to discuss in which he had no share.

"That was a very interesting old place, Mairborough Castle," an oldish gentleman said.

"Oh, did you ever find your locket, Miss Bell?" said a younger one.

"I did; so you won't have to do as you

promised, to-morrow morning," said the girl beside Willie.

"Then it hadn't gone down the well? I was quite prepared to go down after it."

"Yes? All the way?"

"How deep did you say the well was, Miss Bell?" said a third man, who would be classed as young, though he was extensively bald.

"A hundred and sixty-five feet."

"Are you sure it wasn't a hundred and sixty-four?"

"Or yards? Wasn't it yards?" said the former speaker.

"No. It was what I said it was: one hundred and sixty-five feet."

"That comes of being the daughter of a mathematician," said Maitland. "My mother has the same kind of wonderful head. She can remember all the stitches required to knit a *gilet de tricot*, and I don't know what besides."

"Have you come down from town, Mr. Lancroft?" said Ela to Willie, from the opposite side of the table.

"No; I've been staying in Lincolnshire."

"Is anything going on in literature?" said Maitland, from his end.

"No—no, nothing particular;" and then, remembering the new novel, "except that Yeyla's brought out a new book, or rather it's just coming out."

"Oh, well, one will have to read it. Do you know if it's good?"

"Yes, in some ways it's very good. I can lend it you if you'd like to read it. He's sent me an advance copy." By immense effort Willie contrived to rob his face of any expression of triumph or gratified vanity.

"Ah, then keep it away from me," said Mrs. Featherstone; "I don't understand those frightful books. I like something *pour m'égayer* in this *triste* life."

"Yes, I quite agree with you," said the man who had first spoken of Mairborough Castle (Miss Bell's father, as it appeared), a thin, oldish man with

strange wisps of sandy-grey hair around his bald head. "There are quite enough horrors in reality. For a book, you want something pleasant and amusing."

"But you don't read books only to be amused," said Willie, a little nettled at this summary treatment of one whom he numbered among the masters of his art.

"Ah, that is like a young man," Mrs. Featherstone said. "When you are as old as I am, you will want something to take you out of yourself."

"What I dislike about Yeyla," said Mr. Thompson—the young man (natural science fellow of Trinity, it appeared he was) who had been talking about going down the well—"is the pretence of science and physiology that he puts in his books."

"Besides," Mrs. Featherstone was going on, "why must you turn up all these hidden things to light?"

"Yes. That's just what I say," said

Ela, smiling across the table to Willie. The smile made up for much. It seemed to refer to past talks on the same subject between the two, and to establish a certain mutual understanding.

"I'm sure it does a great deal of harm," said Lady Featherstone. "Of course, I've never read any of those books."

"Women are not obliged to read everything," said Maitland. "But at the same time men are not obliged only to write what women can read. Then I suppose you know Yeyla?" he said to Willie.

"Yes, a little," replied the latter.

"What sort of looking man is he? I've never happened to meet him."

"He's got a strong-looking face, and that's about all you can say of him. No. He's also got that sort of rounded forehead which bespeaks a man able to be just, able to see all sides of a question, not easily moved by passion."

"Do you think that's a mark?" said Maitland. "After all, when you talk of

foreheads, you are talking of skulls; and skulls are much more a sign of race than of character."

"Much more," assented Professor Bell, the older man; and Mr. Thompson nodded also, and looked as if he would like to engage in a controversy with Willie.

"What did you mean by the smooth forehead that you spoke of?" said Ela.

"Well, Shakespeare had it. It isn't the square leonine forehead which the Greeks were so fond of. The best example I know of the square forehead is Carlyle's."

"And yet," broke in the bald youngish man, who had up till now been keeping up a bantering talk with Honoria Bell, "you would hardly say the Greeks were wanting in the power of seeing both sides of a question. I should have thought that constituted just their strength and their weakness."

"Y—yes, I dare say it did."

"But I thought you contrasted this round forehead, which implied an im-

partial character, with the square Greek forehead," said the other, pressing the point home.

"Yes, I know. But I was only speaking of my own observations and of individuals."

"I suspect it's much more a question of race than of individuals, as Featherstone says," said the natural science fellow. "Shakespeare probably had Celtic blood in his veins. The round skull is Celtic, and the long skull is Teutonic. Carlyle had a great admiration for long-headed people. He was always talking about them. But he also hated all Celtic people and liked all the Teutonic." He spoke in rather a supercilious way, as perhaps implying that a mere writer of stories had better keep outside the sphere of these craniological studies.

"Two other men I've just thought of who had that smooth sort of forehead," said Willie, speaking across to Ela, "were Pascal and Coleridge."

"Do you think it's true," said Honoria Bell, fixing sad, tender eyes on Lady Featherstone, "that all clever men are ugly and commonplace-looking."

"Me grandfather, Sir William Hutchinson, was the most beautiful old man ye ever saw," said Mrs. Bell, turning towards Maitland.

"I wish I had seen him," said Maitland, gravely. "He was one of the first mathematicians we ever had."

"Don't ye just love mathematics, Mr. Featherstone!" went on the old lady, who seemed for the first time to have found her tongue. "When Will, there, was at work upon his great theorem, do you know that we were at it for a week? and every sheet of paper that he covered with his calculations he handed it over to me, and I went through it all again, and then it was sent off to Mr. Steindorf at Heidelberg. We never spoke a word all the time, but just went on like that between male times."

This was the great romance of Mrs.

Bell's life. And, in truth, the discovery of Bell's and Steindorf's Theorem was a grander achievement than the leading of an army or the gaining of a campaign. "Ye were only six years old then," she ended, nodding towards Honoria, who was still engaged in a flirtation with the bald Professor Everett, on the opposite side of the table.

Lady Featherstone had taken little part in the general conversation. Willie heard her at this point giving her right-hand neighbour, Mr. Bulnoys, a squire from the neighbourhood, the history of some achievement of a son of hers in India, and expressing the hope that he would be appointed on the staff of the commander-in-chief of Bombay. . . . "Oh, my husband hasn't any command," Willie heard her reply. "He's on the Council."

Then she began to speak about another boy at Wellington. This was the first time that Willie realized that Ela had brothers and sisters, and the realization

weighed upon him somehow, he could not tell why. . . .

The ladies retired, Willie was formally presented to the four other male guests—Professor Bell, the great mathematician, Mr. Bulnoys, a country gentleman and an amateur naturalist and antiquary, Mr. Thompson and Mr. Everett, both scientists. These last were what would be called young men, between thirty and thirty-five; Maitland was forty; Mr. Bulnoys and Professor Bell were some ten or twelve years older.

. . . . .

In the drawing-room, Honoria Bell, who was in truth a prodigy of parts, a first-rate mathematician, a linguist and a musician, though so frail that she might seem to be at the mercy of every breath of air, was playing Irish melodies with a touch which made them float into the air as softly as dreams. Mrs. Bell was nodding, and Mrs. Bulnoys and the three Featherstone ladies were grouped together.

"How charmingly she plays!" said Lady Featherstone.

"She's charming altogether," said Mrs. Bulnoys. "You'd never think she was the daughter of that dry-looking old gentleman I sat next at dinner."

"She must be, though," Ela whispered to Mrs. Featherstone (for she felt in an audacious mood), "for Maitland said he was a pure mathematician."

"Ela!" said her mother, who had overheard.

"Qu'importe que le père le soit, ma chère," said Mrs. Featherstone.

Then the gentlemen came in.

Afterwards, Ela in her turn was asked to play, and this she did with great brilliancy. She had gone to Paris especially to study music.

When she left the piano she passed Willie, who had a book in his hand, and was keeping the place with his finger.

"You're not musical, Mr. Lancroft?" she said.

"I beg your pardon. I was listening. B—but," Willie began stammering a little, and then, "Well, I don't think I am musical a bit," he said, with his candid smile.

"Do you know I don't believe I ever heard anybody make that confession before."

"What awful humbugs most people must be, then."

"Perhaps you mean that my friends must be awful humbugs, do you?"

"Well, that would be the same thing. For people say that you know everybody."

"How sharp you are! But ain't you very much ashamed of not caring for music?

'The man that hath no music in his soul
Is fit for trea—'"

"Ah!" Willie had exclaimed, as if he felt a sudden twinge of gout.

"Why did you say *Ah* like that?" she said, stopping in her quotation.

"Because—Well, if you will have it,"

and his smile disarmed resentment in advance, "because of that old misquotation."

"What ought it to be, then?"

> "'The man that hath no music in himself,
> Nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds,
> Is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils.'

*Etcetera*," he said, changing his tone; for he could never give a quotation which he thought fine otherwise than with feeling.

"I see you are particular. You have a fine ear for a quotation, shall I say? I must take care never to quote poetry when you are by," and Ela gave what might be taken for a toss of the head.

"Ought I to have said it was all right?" said Willie, looking penitent.

"No, Mr. Lancroft. You ought to tell the truth and shame the . . . Dear me, I was nearly making a quotation again."

"You are awfully clever, do you know," Willie said, after a moment's reflection, "to be both a musician and an artist."

"But I am *not* an artist. Who ever said that I was?" said Ela, in surprise.

"I thought you had studied art in Paris."

"Oh, no! I went to Paris to study music—and to improve my French, too. I stayed with Madame Chantry, a cousin of Maitland's."

"How disappointing," Willie thought. "What a stupid woman Mrs. Amberley is! She always gets hold of the wrong end of the stick." And he showed his disappointment in his face.

"So I am afraid I can't claim to be considered awfully clever at all," said Ela, with a shade of *dépit*.

But Willie had gone off on a train of thought of his own. "It seems odd, somehow your cousin's being half French, doesn't it? I should have pointed to him as the most perfect type of an Englishman."

"I hope you mean that as a compliment. We all think Maitland *sans reproche*.

"Oh, but I *do*. Please believe that," and Willie coloured with enthusiasm, and his eyes glowed.

"Well, Maitland's only a quarter French, really. Aunt Cécile's mother was English. Yes," Ela went on softly, "they are wonderfully nice people. You know, when I was a little girl, and my father and mother were in India, I used to spend a great deal of time here."

"It's like a home to you, then?"

"Yes. You see we scarcely have any regular home. My father is never well in London for long. We've had the house in Wilton Crescent only three years, since he went back to India, and Longridge, the place we used to have in Sussex, was only on lease; and now the owner's come into it, so we shall have to look out for a fresh house."

"It's jolly coming back to a country house—a house in the country, I mean—where one has been when one was a child, isn't it?"

And from this point, the conversation

branched off into mutual confidences and the interchange of recollections of childhood, which seemed to bring them much nearer intimacy than they had ever been before.

"He's like a great boy in some things," Ela said to herself, as she went to bed, "and rather stupid in some things, too, for a clever man. But in some ways he's very nice, very nice indeed."

. . . . .

If anybody had seen William Lancroft, the author of *London and Paris*, that evening in his bedroom, he would have taken him for at once one of the most eccentric and one of the vainest of men. For he was standing before a full-length mirror, dressed only in under garments, holding a hair brush in either hand, and staring into the depths of the glass. But he was not looking at himself, or indeed at anything. He was only going over, one by one, all the items of conversation in which Ela Featherstone had borne any part. . . And when he had come to the end, he

began again from the beginning; and like the servants of Baal at the command of Elijah, when he had performed the act a second time, he did it a third time. He thought, too, of all the things he had said; and not satisfied with that, he began to think of all the things he might have said. Then of what Ela might have answered to these imaginary speeches. And suddenly he came to himself to find that the candles on his dressing-table and on the chimneypiece had burned half way down; and, not daring to look at his watch, he finished his toilet hurriedly, got into bed, and fell asleep at once.

## CHAPTER X.

WILLIE awoke next morning to a wonderful sound of the twittering and pecking of birds; and an indescribable lightness of heart seemed to lift him from his bed and carry him to the window. His little bachelor's room overlooked an angle of the garden; on one side stood a huge lime tree, whose outer branches all but touched the window, and half hid from view the stable wall. Through the branches of the tree he could just see the stable clock which pointed to six; and he could hear from that direction the sound of the stamping of horses, the rattling of halter chains, and the hundred other sounds of a stable-yard, which was also something of a farm-yard; all re-

minded him of his early home and early days. The flower-beds below his window were brilliant with petunias and geraniums and coleus leaves; the short turf was silvery with dew, save where shadows of a darker shade of green lay across it. Beyond, in the park, lay a sea of white mist, out of which rose the giant shapes of a short avenue of elms. Then farther still, he could see among their trees the tiled and thatched roofs of the village, which at that hour and distance were of a deep indigo. Never had he felt so joyful in his life. It was a feeling akin to fey-dom, ecstatic, unassailable. A cock raised his clear bugle; the swallows about the stable roof were in raptures likewise.

Then, when he had gazed for some minutes, a most pleasant sense of drowsiness stole over him, and he got into bed again. And two hours later, when the man came in to bring his clothes and prepare his bath, he half doubted whether that early morning

hour had not been only a vision of his dreams.

. . . . .

It was a very pleasant breakfast-table to which he came down. At Blythe Wood the savants seemed to forget that they were the instructors of mankind, and the smarts that they were its ornaments. There were only two unmarried girls of the party, and, undoubtedly, the beauty of the two was Honoria Bell, with her peach-like complexion and soft blue eyes. Ela Featherstone was in a white flannel dress. It did not very well suit her angular figure and her red hair. But it gave her almost a school-girlish look, and in Willie's eyes this was an added charm. In truth he had already almost got to the point of thinking that Ela, when she looked plain, was more attractive than other girls when they looked pretty, than which point infatuation can go no further.

Somehow Ela and Willie were each, for different reasons, just a shade left in the

cold, during the first two days. Honoria was the more beautiful woman, and the younger by two or three years, and to Thompson and Everett she was certainly the most attractive. Honoria played excellently at lawn-tennis; though it is true that she could not keep it up very long; but then, neither of the two other young men was possessed of such a solid physique as Willie Lancroft. They did not ride either; so that when an expedition was organized, it was Maitland, Ela, and Willie who made the riding party. And for some reason, which must have been independent of any jealousy excited by this fact, the other two young men seemed, from the time of Willie's first appearance, to have given each other the word to snub light literature, and keep as much as possible to science.

In the evening of Willie's second day, Henry Gourlay appeared, and that restored the balance of parties; all the more so that he began at the dinner table to speak in high praise of some illustra-

tions which Hope had made for a French illustrated paper, and which had just begun to appear. It was the end of August. Gourlay brought down the September number with him, and Willie too received a copy by post the same afternoon. Of the three scientific guests present, none had so much as heard the name of Hope Lancroft.

"That," said Gourlay, looking across to Willie and raising his shoulders, "shows what fame is. Some people say your cousin will be one of the finest black-and-white artists of the century, and that they prefer him to Fortuni."

Willie himself had not realized that anyone thought so highly of Hope.

"And does he illustrate what you write?" said another new-comer, Lady Lefanu, who had not paid much attention to this dialogue, having never heard of Willie Lancroft before that day. "I've some cousins called Hope—the Dungannon Hopes, you know. Is the Mr. Hope, your cousin, of that family?"

Privately she supposed that a man who illustrated books was hardly likely to be a gentleman.

"Oh, Hope's only his Christian name," Willie said. "It's the same name as mine—Lancroft."

"I believe you and I are endowed—or cursed, shall I say?—with the same Christian name," said Professor Bell. "I think, with all apologies to you, that to hear oneself called Willie is a mighty great safeguard against anything like over self-esteem."

"I've found that," Willie replied. "Nothing could be more fatal—to me. It has made me act like a fool all my life."

"My dear Mr. Lancroft," said Mrs. Featherstone, "you could not be worse treated than I was in my baptism. Think of any one having the cruelty to christen me Cécile. If you've ever read French romances of the sentimental kind—I know you've read the others—you'll know what part the Cécile in those books plays.

She's always dressed in white for one thing. *Jamais, jamais de la vie* does the Cécile of a French novel put on a coloured dress. Think of the bill of the laundress! And she is always slim and *ingénue* to a degree! What a cruel satire to give such a name to me!"

And the round, little Mrs. Featherstone laughed her low, pleasant laugh, and looked in a very friendly way on Willie Lancroft, to whom she had taken a liking.

"Still," said Maitland, "our only English saint is called William."

"Our only English saint!" said Ela.

"I thought he was called Williams," said Willie, "the Immortal Williams."

"Isn't he our only English saint?" said Gourlay to Ela.

"It's curious," said Maitland; "if you come to think of it, he's the only Englishman in whom the most grumbling, critical people in the world find no fault. Whenever we find a fault in Shakespeare we say it's somebody else's, that he collaborated with somebody."

"And yet I once knew a publisher," said Professor Bell, "a cousin of mine—(ye'll remember Harry Blake, Mary) used to work for 'em—he wanted my cousin to help him bring out an edition of Shakespeare, leaving out all the inferior passages. He said, 'We'll just put in a note, Mr. Blake. "'Ere the bard of Avon falls below himself."'"

And the great mathematician gave a momentary hollow laugh and then blushed.

From this the conversation drifted to the discussion of Shakespeare's shortcomings. But they passed from that to his excellencies; then to the subject of blank verse and rhyme.

"After all," said Willie, at a pause, "the most musical of our poets, out and away, is Milton."

All exclaimed in the negative.

"Oh, a horror! Milton, I cannot understand a word of him," said Mrs. Featherstone.

"A dreadful old Puritan," said Honoria Bell, "as bad as Cromwell."

"How can you defend a man whose highest conception of the Divine Council is, that it's a sort of Calvinistic pulpit, or a Westminster Confession," said Thompson.

"And look at the way he mixes up classical and Biblical mythology," said Everett.

"B—but I wasn't speaking of those things," said Willie, flushing red. "I—I was speaking of the music of his verse. W—what has his theology to do with that? There's no verse in the English language comparable to some of his. You can't possibly beat the lines at the beginning of the Seventh Book, for instance,—"

"Seventh Book of what—Paradise Lost?" said Ela, at his elbow.

"Paradise Lost, of course," said Willie, forgetting himself in his interest in the subject; and he was collecting his memory to quote them, when Everett spoke.

"Well, I can't enjoy the versification

independently of the matter," he said. "Did you have a pleasant ride, Miss Featherstone?"

"Very!" said Ela, cordially, and she talked more to Mr. Everett than she had done yet.

For this evening Honoria was talking sentiment with Mr. Thompson, and Everett felt a trifle nettled.

Ela had watched Willie's face.

"He takes some things so ridiculously seriously," she thought.

She objected to his talking about Milton instead of talking to her.

Willie had all through that day looked forward to another talk with Ela, and imagined the setting for it precisely the same as for their first evening's conversation. Only there was to be this difference, that he had thought over what he was to say, and somehow Ela was always, as it were, to give him the right cue. He felt that their talk was too *banal*, too conventional. But, somehow, Ela's neighbourhood at the dinner-table took

away from him the ideas he had wished to express. So clearly had his imagination pictured the setting of their next evening's talk, that he never thought of trying to bring it on sooner. He had had many opportunities of talking to Ela during that day, but of those he made no effective use, not wishing to anticipate the evening.

But when this second evening did come it proved to be quite unlike the first; and all Willie's plans vanished into air. One or two local people had come to dinner, and, somehow or other, there was a little dance in the hall later in the evening. Maitland saw it begin and then took himself off with Professor Bell to the smoking-room.

Willie, before he quite knew it, found himself deep in conversation not with Ela, but with Miss Anstey, the sister of the local doctor, an angular young lady with deep-set eyes and faded goodish looks. Though she lived ten months out of the twelve in this neglected country corner, Miss

Anstey proved to be well up in all the fine art of Europe—far more so than Willie was himself. The spare two months spent every year in travelling with her brother had sufficed for this knowledge. Willie and his partner were so interested in their talk that they forgot to dance, and Ela, passing now and then by their seat under the palms, heard with some disgust their scraps of dialogue.

"Yes, I've seen all his best things," she heard Miss Anstey say, "the great pictures of the Weavers or the Bacchanals at Madrid, for instance, and the equestrian portraits of Olivares and Don Balthazar Carlos, and the group called Las Meniñas. I can't understand what people mean by setting him above Titian, for instance."

"I only know the pictures in the Louvre," said Willie, "and those we've got here. But I must say the Infanta Marguerite, for instance—"

"The one in the Salon Carré? Yes, I remember it—it is one of his very best."

"It does put out the other pictures all round it."

"Oh! not the Mona Lisa. You can't say that. Or the *homme au gant*" (she pronounced it *hum ô gant*, Ela noticed; Miss Anstey spoke Spanish, French, and Italian, but all three with a strong English accent) "in the long gallery."

"Shall we take another turn?" Ela's partner said to her. He was the doctor himself, this girl's brother. Ela had heard Maitland speak of him as something out of the common; and she knew that Mr. Thompson, the physiologist, had been anxious to meet him. But all that she noticed in him was a tendency to wipe his forehead furtively with his pocket-handkerchief, and to introduce her name, "Miss Featherstone," too frequently into his conversation. She felt disgusted with herself for not finding more in him, or with him for not showing more what he had got in himself. And every time her eyes fell upon Willie in

J. Callan



conversation with Miss Anstey her disgust increased. . . .

"I saw you talking of something very interesting to Miss Anstey," Ela said to Willie, when, a little later, he was helping her to some lemonade in a corner of the hall. He looked so pleased and happy that it was hard for her to keep a tone of sarcasm out of her voice.

"Oh, yes; she's rather clever. I've promised to go and see her photographs. She says she's got nearly four hundred. I suppose a good many quite small."

"Photographs, what of—places she's been to?"

"Oh, no!" Willie spoke, with some surprise. "Of pictures from the great galleries. We've been talking about the admiration the French have for Velasquez and their way of looking at art. . . ."

"How fond you are of anything French!" Ela could not suppress a note of discontent as she spoke.

"No, I don't think I am, really, particularly. Somehow I got a good

deal . . ." But here Willie paused. He had an instinctive dislike to talking about himself. "I've often thought since, by the way," he said, his thoughts flying beyond his words, "of what you once said to me about Othello. Do you remember?"

This took Ela wholly by surprise. It was said so simply that it bore no suspicion of flattery about it. And, coming as an undesigned answer to her ill-humour, she felt disarmed of more than that."

"I don't think I do, quite; tell me," she said, in a gentle voice, which even to her ear had almost a caress in it. The voice seemed to speak of itself, sweetly exonerating her of responsibility.

They were moving away from the table and she had her hand on Willie's arm. She felt a sudden throb pass through him like an electric shock. He stammered a little in his reply.

"A—about it b—being wrong to make life out to be worse than it is. I've

rather gone on that tack, I know. I got it from the French; now I regret it. After all life is a beautiful *place*. Don't you think so?"

"Do you think so?" answered Ela, evasively. She was afraid of slipping back into conventional talk. ("After all, why should not I have an intimate talk as well as anybody else?" she said to herself.) "Have you had a happy life on the whole?"

"Oh, yes! I should say so," said Willie, rather doubtfully. "At any rate I've forgotten all the bad parts of it." And there was something gentle and simple in his look and voice.

"At any rate I suppose it's happy now. It ought to be."

"Yes, oughtn't it?" said Willie, with a sharp look, and returning against his will to the sort of badinage which seemed to belong to his intercourse with Ela Featherstone.

Ela blushed, not altogether pleased.

"I meant you have been so successful, haven't you?"

"What is being successful? Getting what one wishes for?"

"I suppose you have got what you wished for most—literary success?"

"That's not what I wish for most," he said.

There was no danger of Ela thinking that Miss Anstey had anything to do with the way in which this was said; but beyond that part Ela did not continue the inquiry. That moment's impulse, that voice which spoke of itself, and which it had been so pleasant to let speak, had passed.

But she went to bed satisfied with that evening's talk, in which, to tell the truth, all had been said and not said that she wished. It *was* nice to think that chance words of hers, which she herself forgot as soon as they were spoken, remained engraven on the memory of a "distinguished man." Maitland might think of her what he chose. She went to sleep firm in her unavowed intention of keeping Willie Lancroft to herself,

without in any way committing herself to him.

Willie, for his part, felt not otherwise than a person transported out of this world to heaven. He had gone up in a fiery chariot, and the life of common things knew him no more. Was it that very morning that he had looked out upon the dewy shadows and the birds? Then it had been all vague hope, he scarcely knew of what; now it was certainty. He did not ask why, nor admit a single doubt; in truth, he did not even think. But all through the night, as he turned in his sleep and half awoke, he had a delicious sense of a great event having taken place, and a vivid memory of a certain touch upon his arm, of a tone of voice, a look in a pair of inexpressible green-grey eyes. Something like this, in truth, he had felt on the evenings of successful composition—some poem that he felt *must* take later on—some episode in his stories, or some splendid notice in the papers.

Something like this; but only a pale adumbration of what he now felt; just as all previous affections of the heart—his fancy for Alice Kirkwhite long ago, and for one or more since—passions of a day, were but faint foretellings of this which he felt to be the passion of a lifetime.

And all this was settled without conscious thought over the matter, merely by the thrilling of his nerves, of his whole entity; not even in waking hours only, but by a cumulative process which went on all night through.

So that the moment he awoke he *knew*, without asking how or why, that he was a new being living in a new world. His wings had grown in the night; or, to use a better simile, a miraculous new gift had descended upon him, like the gift of tongues, the gift of prophecy.

It was to answer all the difficulties which had beset him all his life long. All those strivings after expression, that sense of a mysterious hidden presence called Art, those doubts, those question-

ings of a Divinity, all these had answered themselves in the course of eight hours of deliciously broken sleep. All evil thoughts and evil desires had fallen away from him, all jealousies—of Hope or anyone else—all disappointments, all resentments had vanished. He was what the religious call a new man—without any merit or any effort on his own part. An assurance of salvation as firm as Johannes Agricola's, with that he welcomed the returning day.

And the amiability of his feelings towards all the world, could not but show itself to those about him. It was on this third day of Lancroft's visit that Maitland Featherstone decided in his mind that Lancroft really was one of the nicest fellows he had ever met. Of course a writer was not in Maitland's estimate "in it" as such beside a scientist, as a desirable person to know. But, as a man, that Lancroft certainly was superior to all his other guests; and Maitland was rather glad instead of sorry, that Gourlay

had not turned up on the day he promised, as it would almost oblige Willie to stay till the Friday the 1st of September. The only person who did not thoroughly appreciate Willie's good nature and good spirits was Honoria Bell. He was almost the first man she had met who had seemed blind to her attractions. She was not slow to divine the reason of this unaccountable blindness; and, with the natural perversity of her sex (or of either sex), she began to estimate Willie at a higher price than Mr. Thompson or Professor Everett who were already her subjects.

"He ought at any rate to be obliged to me," she said to herself, "for cutting that Ela Featherstone out. But men never understand what a difference all that makes." Perhaps frail health and too much mathematical knowledge had made something of a cynic of Honoria Bell. "I wonder if I shall ever get married after all?" she said to herself, with a little sigh. "Perhaps I'll die first."

She was watching Ela and Willie play a "single" lawn-tennis. It was too hot for her to play; at any rate with the fatigue of a long journey to look forward to; for the Bells were going away after lunch, and would cross that night to Dublin. Those two players looked so strong and healthy. What was the use of life without health and strength? "I hope I will, almost," she said, bitterly.

## CHAPTER XI.

On the third day of his stay at Blythe Wood, Willie Lancroft felt as if he had been there for years. He was now—by the afternoon that is—the oldest inhabitant among the guests; the Bells, Mr. Thompson and Mr. Everett having all left. He and Ela, too, were almost the only unmarried people in the house. And, fortunately for him, Lady Featherstone, who stayed in-doors that day with a headache, hardly remembered that he was there; she was so habituated to think of persons not in Society as denizens of another planet, that, unless they were forcibly brought under her notice, she forgot them readily.

It was a day of pause; a day between departures and arrivals. The Arthur Featherstones might be expected any minute. But in the afternoon the house was left very empty. Maitland took the occasion to shut himself into his study and work all the afternoon. And by a chance it seemed as if the very trees of the garden and the park partook of this sense of repose—they held up their heavy mantles of dark green foliage unstirred by a breath.

Ela never admitted to herself that the unseen force of her mother's will—or wishes at any rate—drew her in any direction contrary to her own. But there were times when she felt a sense of relief away from Lady Featherstone's neighbourhood, and these she celebrated by giving herself moments of plenary indulgence. She was in such a mood now. It was nice to find—what she always wished to find—the atmosphere of Blythe Wood wholly congenial; and nice again to discover one of the class whom

Lady Featherstone spoke of collectively as "Maitland's geniuses" of whom she could make a friend.

"Mr. Lancroft," she thought, was "very nice" that day. In truth Willie's good spirits and amiability were, in the afternoon, shaded by a tinge of melancholy. Two days of his stay in Paradise had gone; the angel with the flaming sword might be seen on the horizon. Ela noticed this *nuance* of sadness. Was it because of Honoria Bell's departure, after all? She must find out—out of mere curiosity.

"Well," she said, as they were walking along a green path between standard roses, "the place seems empty to-day, doesn't it?"

"I ought to go to-morrow, I suppose," said her companion, gloomily.

"I don't see that there's any *ought* about it if you don't want to."

"If I don't want to?" and as he said this Willie fixed his eyes upon Ela. It was a look which it would be difficult to

mistake the meaning of. Ela's curiosity about Honoria Bell might have been satisfied. And if it was, there was surely no reason for going on. But Ela did go on; though her heart beat rather rapidly as she spoke. It was not a very common sensation with her, and it was not wholly disagreeable.

"Well, I don't suppose it's very lively here," she said, looking down. "Didn't you say that you were going to stay at Macolmsbrae?"

"It's very delightful being here," said Willie, without replying to the last question, and not dropping his eyes.

"Well, then, I should stay, if I were you," said Ela, in a lighter tone.

"One can't quite do what one would wish about these things; can you? You see I've only known your cousin—well, less than three months, and you too, Miss Featherstone."

Then Ela spoke against her conscience,—

"Dear me, no; no more it is. It was

in June last that I met you at the Strathclydes, wasn't it? I feel somehow . . ." but here she stopped. "I think we might sit down on this bank," she said.

"I wish," said Willie, after a pause, "I knew what you were going to say just now. About . . . when you stopped, I mean."

"Oh, only that I felt as if I had known you more than two months. I think somehow you are an easy person to get to know."

"Well, do you know, I should say the same of you, if I might."

"Oh! But when I said it, it was a compliment. I meant that you didn't entrench yourself in your cleverness or your learning or your science, and think it necessary to talk down to me, as Mr. Thompson and Mr. Everett do sometimes. . . ."

"*Talk down* to you! No, I certainly never thought of trying to do that."

"Now when you say it of me," Ela went on, not heeding this interruption,

"it means that I am a shallow person whose chararcter is easy to read."

"No! Indeed it doesn't mean that in the least. It means a frank person who does not pose."

"Well, I hope I do not pose; but perhaps we've talked enough about that," Ela said, with a sudden recollection of her dignity.

At that moment, out of another garden path, emerged the frail figure of Henry Gourlay. He looked Willie straight in the face for a moment with his fatigued blue eyes, made some passing remark, and then disappeared again.

"I don't know how it is," said Ela, "Henry Gourlay always makes me feel cold down my back. There's something rather uncanny about him; don't you think so?"

"Yes, rather queer," said Willie, thinking of all the stories he had heard about Gourlay.

"It is pose though, isn't it?" Willie went on, reverting in thought to their

previous conversation, but in a different mood, to suit the change of Ela's; "that prevents one from knowing people properly. I didn't notice what you said about Thompson or Everett." (This was not strictly true.) "But I've noticed that sort of condescending manner in distinguished people, and that is one sort of pose. The scientific people, some of them, have a special form. It consists in the making of bad puns whenever you try and get them on a serious discussion. At the back of their minds they mean you to understand that it would be impossible for you to enter into the profundity of their thoughts and experiments and all that."

"Yes, it's a great pity," said Ela. "Maitland gets so much out of his friends and seems to think so much of them, and I can never get anything."

Willie laughed slightly.

"Isn't that one of the speeches one would rather have left unsaid?" he said.

"Oh, no. I count you quite as much my friend as Maitland's; I knew you first, you know." And, as she spoke, Ela gave her companion a look from out of her bright squirrel-like eyes which made Willie's lips turn pale. . . .

"How much you know about astronomy!" Ela said, after a pause. "I wish I could have understood that theory which you and Maitland were discussing about comets."

"About aërolites and the comet's tail? Oh, it's not difficult. I think I could explain it."

And he did so with great lucidity and patience; for Ela was duller at making deductions than he expected, or than he acknowledged to himself. At any rate, he was rewarded: for Ela was very humble and very gentle over the matter. And this little event led in the end to a slight correspondence between them during the winter months.

. . . . .

Maitland, on his side, had been balanc-

ing the pros and cons. Personally, he would have liked Lancroft to stay a day or two longer. But then the day after to-morrow was the First. There were Vansittart and the two Arthur Featherstones, father and son, coming to shoot; and the Lefanus were here already, and Gourlay; and there were the prejudices of his gamekeeper to be humoured. Probably, Lancroft could not shoot—if only he would not want to try. So amid these rather conflicting motives, he said, when Willie talked of going the next day,—

"Oh, must you go? I should be very glad if you could stay a day or two longer. You see Gourlay did not turn up when we expected him. Do you shoot, by the way?"

"Oh, thanks," said Willie. "I should like to stay, certainly." Maitland had not spoken with superabundant cordiality. But he meant to stay if he possibly could.

"I've got a certain number of—well, not sisters, cousins, and aunts precisely,

but uncles and cousins and that sort of thing, coming to-morrow. I must ask them sometimes, and it's always been the custom for them to come for the First. But if you don't shoot—if you won't think me rude—I think perhaps it would rather bore you and them. . . ."

"Oh, I can shoot all right," said Willie; "at least, I have always done so since I was sixteen. But if it's a family party. . . ."

"Oh, no! Not a bit. Excuse me, my dear fellow. The fact is, you know what people are in a shooting party—if they don't shoot, and will go out all the same. I'm obliged to go in for it; not but that I like shooting well enough myself. But I don't mind saying I get infernally bored of an evening, sometimes; and if you'd stay and keep me company, you would really be doing me a great kindness."

And in that way it was settled.

. . . . .

The whole house changed its character when the shooting party arrived—the

Arthur Featherstones (the son was a lieutenant in the 60th Rifles), and Captain Vansittart, whom Willie had seen at Lady Strathclyde's garden-party. These and two new ladies were the fresh arrivals. The men above-mentioned, with Sir Robert Lefanu, Gourlay, Maitland, and Lancroft, made up the shooting-party on the First. Gourlay was an excellent shot, but easily tired, so that he commonly took little part in the conversation of an evening. He made a sort of apology for this to Willie. "After all," he said, "Paris is the place where one goes for that sort of thing. 'Le Sport' is our line over here. I don't come to England much; but when I do, it's generally at this time for a little shooting."

And in the mood that Willie was, it seemed to him quite natural and right that English people should prefer shooting to talking. He had acquitted himself, if not brilliantly, satisfactorily that day, and had once gained that coveted

thing—a word of praise from Simmonds, the game-keeper. "You brought them two down very neat, sir," Simmonds had opened his mouth to say, then shut it again. Lady Featherstone, Ela, Lady Lefanu, and a Mrs. and Miss Meryddith-Jones, had joined them at luncheon-time. It had been a blissful day.

Then, when he came home in the evening, with that sense of virtue upon him, which physical fatigue alone has the power to bestow, and tramped through the wide hall and up the wide shallow stairs in his heavy boots and gaiters, he had a delightful consciousness of his own strength and robustness. He thought meanly of his intellectual endowments by comparison; and as he was actually looking down on Gourlay as he made the above speech, in the depths of his soul he was doing so in every respect. The unhappy man, physically and morally crippled! He, Willie Lancroft, so robust, morally as well as physically (some trifling past peccadilloes put on

one side, which should never, never be repeated), and some day—it seemed too good to be true, but hope whispered that it was true all the same—to receive the highest conceivable reward for his virtue. These thoughts remained with him as—having had his hot bath and with his whole being permeated with a sense of cleanliness, virtue, and well-being—he buttoned his sleeve-links and put the other finishing touches to his dressing. . .

At dinner that day, Willie was nowhere near Ela. He sat between Miss Meryddith-Jones and Lady Lefanu, and Miss Meryddith-Jones seemed to find more entertainment in Lieutenant Featherstone's conversation than in her left-hand neighbour's.

Willie sent many glances across to Ela Featherstone, and once she looked back at him very pleasantly. But she appeared too to be getting on very well with her partner, Captain Vansittart. The talk was not, he gathered, about astronomy. Numberless names came to

the surface, and Captain Vansittart made smart little observations about each person in turn.

"Lord Walter has got, well, p'raps it's only what those French fellows call *la veine*, don't you know. But he's been doin' surprisin' well this year. He's got so much of *la veine*—we'll call it that, eh?—that I expect people'll soon get deuced shy of havin' anythin' to do with his horses, don't you see?"

And Ela replied,—

"But I can't make out how it is that people let any one . . ."

But here his attention was taken up by Lady Lefanu.

"Do you know my friend, Cora Doyle, Mr. Lancroft? She writes those very clever little stories in *Veritas*. Of course, I don't like that paper, but . . . ."

Again he heard Captain Vansittart.

"Oh, dear old Gargoyde! . . . . Oh, yes, she was at Auchintrochy that autumn, had the pleasure of meetin' you there, wasn't she? Ah? well, she is jus'—the

—same. It's like that song, don't you know ?—

> 'Men may come and men may go
> And she goes on for ever,'

only I fancy they go now more than they come, don't you see ?"

. . . . .

Later in the evening in the smoking-room the change in the *personnel* of the guests was made still more conspicuous. Captain Vansittart and some of the other men had disappeared : for a few minutes Maitland and Willie were alone. Willie's heart beat with a warmer affection for his host than he had ever felt before ; and he remembered with gratitude what Maitland had said about the pleasure of having someone to talk to. But how odd that they should be the only persons to stay and smoke. Surely, for instance, Sir Robert had done so the night before ? Thereupon the door opened and Captain Vansittart appeared, gorgeously arrayed in maroon velvet faced with blue silk. Mr. Arthur Featherstone, the father, and

his son the subaltern were only one degree the less splendid. Even Sir Robert Lefanu, who the day before had appeared in simple dress clothes, now shone in parti-coloured raiment. Gourlay had gone to bed. Maitland and Willie only represented the old *régime*. This fashion of the smoking-room was something of a novelty then, even among smart people; it filled Willie Lancroft with amazement.

All the smokers, by a sort of instinct, grouped themselves round Captain Vansittart, who was full of stories and of facts touching sport in different countries. There was nothing in what he said; and yet Willie could not but acknowledge to himself that he said it well, keeping himself the centre of the group and keeping the ball of conversation in his own hands, without ever seeming to wish to do so, without ever ignoring his host or, indeed, any of his fellow guests. Willie was ashamed of himself for feeling a certain pleasure whenever Captain Vansittart

addressed some parenthetic remark to him. "I don't know whether you know him?" "Did you ever try them?" He had felt the same sort of pleasure and the same sort of shame in old days at the approval of a Clay or a Beverley when he was a bank clerk.

"Shall I be always like that?" he said to himself.

Maitland might have wished to have somebody "sensible" to talk to, but it was quite impossible for him to separate himself from the group round Captain Vansittart. The latter, indeed, nominally talked chiefly to his host. And Maitland, Willie thought, seemed to resign himself very contentedly, smoking his pipe peacefully, and with the same comfortable, good-natured look upon his face.

When he went to bed that night Willie Lancroft felt less proud of his physical strength and of his virtuous trampings over turnip fields all day; not so inclined

to be contemptuous of Henry Gourlay, who had never come into the smoking-room, and was, perhaps, sleeping comfortably, undisturbed by tumultuous thoughts.

## CHAPTER XII.

"He saw what he had made and behold it was very good." Willie used this not too modest quotation as he read over the draft of his lecture for the Royal Institution. And though he knew, as he did so, that he was accustomed to consider the work of his hands good the first time that he read it, in most cases to change next time to a diametrically opposite view and the third time to change back again to a moderate appreciation, the knowledge did not take away an iota from the pleasure which he felt in this new thing.

It was a great opportunity for him this lecture; it would be his own fault, he owned to himself, if he did not do it

justice. Somehow, during the last six months—it was six months since he last saw Ela at Blythe Wood, and they had only corresponded since—he had not done much original work. But yet he was boiling over with a turbulent vitality of spirit; so that he felt as if there had never been such a productive era in his life as this. Nay, he had, he assured himself, bidden adieu to his past self, which was a sort of Old Adam unfit to live in the paradise whose gates had opened for him now. *Das Auge sieht den Himmel offen:* the familiar quotation was often in his thoughts; and to Willie it appeared not trite at all, but the expression of a hidden truth which few but he were permitted to know.

All his experiences were new and wonderful and scarcely possible to anybody else. Ela was absolutely *sui generis*, he was convinced of that. Never had been produced a character with such feminine perfections free from feminine weaknesses, such a combination of tender-

ness and strength. This is what Willie Lancroft said to himself.

Yet that this semi-divine being would some day join her existence with his he felt no reasonable doubt. She was so simple, so utterly genuine, that those nothings, those looks and tones, which could not be described in words, must mean that she had chosen him. It was such an unimaginable piece of good fortune that it must be part of a scheme of Providence, as Willie vaguely felt—not with any very fixed idea of what Providence was or how it worked in daily affairs, but with a conviction that there was destined to grow out of his personal happiness some lasting benefit for the world. He was on the eve, nay, half-way beyond the threshold, of a new discovery in art which this time was to be a final one. He remembered how, long ago in his Paris days, he had had divinations of a new canon in art which, imperfect as was that vision, had really helped him forward. Now he had come

nearer the great truth and beginning of truths, as Carlyle calls *his* discovery in *Sartor Resartus;* only Willie Lancroft's was to be a greater truth still. A passionate desire to translate his transcendental experiences into some permanent form stirred within him. He never doubted that they were transcendental, scarcely possible to any other human being. What he did not divine was how many thousands of poor, inconsidered, inarticulate men and women, seamstresses, washerwomen, servant maids, commercial travellers, business men, doctors, lawyers, beggars, thieves perhaps, who, when they loved never thought of themselves at all, and therefore never came to ask whether they had found out any new secret of existence or of art, or whether their passion was of a sort superior to the rest of the world's, might yet be farther on in their discovery of this secret of life than he was.

But being what he was—with all the egoism of an artist—it was impossible

for him not to translate his particular experience into a general law; to draw from it some hidden truth and seek (as a modern writer has said, all Art and Science seek,) to bind it in such fetters that it might increase the pleasure and the profit of endless generations of men.

But how was all this done, or to be done in a single lecture for the Royal Institution? His thoughts had outrun his steps. Certainly it would have been difficult to find all this in the sketch he had been reading over; and there came into Willie Lancroft's mind a verse he had written long ago in his early London days,—

> "My thought has wings,
> And high as to the gate of heaven upsprings;
> But ah! my words are leaden-shod and slow,
> And may not follow where my thoughts can go."

And, as he tried to concentrate his mind to re-read the lecture, he continued to repeat these lines mechanically. The oftener he said them over, the poorer they seemed; but to find them thus was

rather a pleasure than otherwise. Had they not been written by that pitiable other self on whom the God of Love had never smiled?

Yes, he was on the edge. . . Then a sudden shock of instinctive memory passed through him. It was what physiologists explain as a sort of hemi-cranial action of the brain, but which, in this case as in others, was only the memory of a sensation without its circumstances. It seemed as if he had thought all this long before. And he had done so, what time he was, or fancied himself to be, in love with Alice Kirkwhite; only this old love was for the moment forgotten utterly.

No; he could not put in his lecture all that was in his thoughts. But he would, he must, write something that was beyond the common; above all, he must raise aloft the standard and the symbols of his art.

The title of his lecture was *Realistic Fiction;* it was as a writer of realistic

stories that he would speak to the people that day.

He had been at his club one afternoon not long ago, and heard McQueen, Rainford, Hippersley, all writers in his department of literature, discussing prices. Agitation was keen for American copyright; and the writers were discussing the addition that that would effect in their gains. From personal matters they passed to the incomes which other authors made to-day, and the amount of work they had to do for them. Then to the rate given for stories, short or long, in the illustrated papers, and so forth.

This commonplace and natural talk seemed to Willie, in his exalted condition, something like profanity against the art they all professed. This talk it was, more than anything else, that had decided him in his choice of a subject for his lecture, and upon the treatment thereof. All fiction was, he fancied, menaced, root and branch, in England at least—in this practical, scientific country. . . .

There was nothing here of what was working deepest in his mind; but still he had said an effective word for fiction, dealt a stroke for his opinions. He saw what he had made, and behold it was—passably good on the whole. The first portion, the argumentative part, would certainly stand. Could he only get more *verve* into the second half!

And at this point Willie Lancroft took from his drawer a photograph of Ela Featherstone. It was a remarkably good one; save that her red hair had been turned into black. The features in the picture were a shade refined upon those of the original; the squirrel-like eyes had lost their half-mischievous glance, and were softened more to the aspect of the eyes of a fawn; and in place of the alert, friendly look, which was Ela's usual one, the whole face had an expression gentle and earnest, such as might not ill have suited a Madonna. Willie propped the photograph against a book on the table, and, crossing his arms over

the back of a chair, gazed at the likeness in a sort of rapture.

"Oh! inspire me!" he thought as he looked, and the thought was three-parts a prayer.

All that passed through his mind? The experiences of a lifetime seemed to be there. The illimitable breadth of the sea, as he still bore the impression of it from his visit to Speilby in the autumn: this was the symbol for him, first of his unutterable devotion to Ela Featherstone, and next of all the good for the world which somehow was to flow from his own happiness. And thereat his thoughts by a sudden transition—yet logical enough in the main—travelled to his gloomy experiences of the squalid and tragic side of life—a limitless sea this too, out of which he had drawn some pailfuls for his own art. Our English East-end with its brutalities and devotions, one as strange as the other; the French East-end, the *ouvrier* world, its infamies and its ideals. Then the world of Paris

students, so tragic in their ruffianism, in their blind gropings after something higher. . . .

After all, it was hard to fit that face on to Ela Featherstone—the Ela that he knew. Perhaps that was why he got less inspiration from looking at his Madonna than other devotees have done.

Willie remembered, how in old days, he had steadfastly purposed, when his work had got a certain rotundity and completion, to devote some part of his time and thought to the amelioration of those hard lives with which he had been brought in contact. Somehow, he had quite abandoned that thought. Without saying so much to himself, he recognized how completely such efforts would be foreign to Ela's character and mode of life.

"Have you ever heard her, when you have dwelt casually on this aspect of life, express any commiseration for those sad lives?"

Thus spake, far in the inner depths of his being, a voice unattended to.

"She's so absolutely free from pose, so perfectly genuine and sincere," Willie said to himself, in answer to this unlistened-to voice. "That's her supreme merit. All the women in society who talk philanthropy and that sort of thing, pose. They don't do anything for the world they live in, and they quiet their consciences by shedding a sentimental tear like Sterne—"

"All women in Society may be like that," said the captious voice. "But people in Society do not sum up the human race."

"And of course, people who are in Society, can't help being in Society," Willie went on without attending.

"H'm'" was all the captious voice replied. Then it was silent. . .

Willie Lancroft recognized at the bottom of his heart, that the active benevolence which he had once dreamt of, would be quite out of his power now.

He was too exalted to think steadily about ways and means; but he instinctively knew that he would want all the money he could earn. How happy, then, was he that he had found this new method of helping the world by preaching to it!

This was his final conclusion as he ceased from his labours and went out for a walk in the streets, already growing dark. . .

When after dinner he returned to his rooms, he found a note from Mrs. Featherstone, asking him to dine with them two nights hence at Portland Place. "Ela, my niece, will be with us," she wrote, "if it is needful to give you this invincible reason for letting the discourse alone for one night." Mrs. Featherstone knew all about the lecture, which her son had had something to do in bringing about—and about its progress; for Maitland, who had preceded his mother in coming to London, had strolled into Willie's rooms in Adam Street, once or

twice of a Sunday morning. The Maitland Featherstones (as they were often called) did not usually come up for the season. Mrs. Featherstone came sometimes, and stayed at a private hotel in town for a month or so, then very likely went on and did the same in Paris; Maitland always had a bedroom ready for him at his club.

But this time, the Featherstones had taken a house for the season. It was for the sake of introducing another of Mrs. Featherstone's nieces, Mabel, one of the Arthur Featherstones. It was a duty which would naturally have devolved upon Lady Featherstone—and Mabel would have much preferred it, had that been the arrangement. But Lady Featherstone was kept at Bournemouth, to take care of Sir Proby, who was advised not to face the rigours of a London Spring. Ela had come up from Bournemouth to stay with her aunt and keep Mabel in countenance.

"It's the luckiest thing in the world,

that Ela should have come up precisely at this moment," Willie said to himself, the day before the dinner. "I'm rather apt to be stupid and *distrait* when I'm in the middle of a piece of work; now that the lecture is practically done and done well, by God, I feel as jolly as a sand-boy." And in order to blow away the fumes of his work and shorten the time between then and to-morrow evening, he went out of town, and spent the whole day walking along the south-down cliffs and listening to the beloved sound of the waves. And when he got back in the afternoon of the next day, he found to his disappointment that Maitland had called the day before to take him to some picture exhibition, where no doubt Ela and Mabel Featherstone had gone too. He and Maitland had become immensely intimate during the six months that had succeeded his visit at Blythe Wood. For Maitland, as has been said, was often in London, and at all times of the year. "He suits me down to the ground,"

Maitland had said. And that was enough for him ; it was not of Maitland's nature to seek to justify his choice by discovering any exceptional good qualities in his friends. Mrs. Featherstone, too, had taken to Willie a good deal.

## CHAPTER XIII.

The little disappointment about the picture gallery, did not prevent Willie as he drove up to Portland Place from feeling that everything was arranging itself in the most perfect manner. He felt that he had never appreciated before the spaciousness of that finest of London Streets; nor the stateliness and yet variety of the houses; the solidity and comfort of the one to which he was admitted. Perhaps there is no situation more near Paradise, than that of a man who has come to dine at a house where he is *bien vu*, and is going to meet there the girl of his heart. (That any person of Willie's social position—or want of it—should have been well seen in a house like

that of the Featherstones, was contrary to all rules of decorum. But it was the case notwithstanding.)

Even the creature comforts attending such an occasion, the passage from chilly evening into a warm, lighted hall, the attentions of the servants, the presage of a good dinner, above all the first entry into the drawing room, and the pleasant glitter of smart dresses and jewellery and pretty faces, become poetized by sentiment and lose their grossness.

Willie caught sight of himself in a mirror as he went upstairs, and at a glance determined (with pardonable vanity) that he looked his best. Like most fair people he generally looked his best in dress clothes. The thought of that partly reconciled him to his disappointment of the day before. And now—the servant was holding the door open; in one moment he would see *her* again.

Willie felt a thrill of pleasure when Mrs. Featherstone gave him her left hand

without getting up from her seat, but retaining her hold of his for half a minute, as she said in her good-natured *d'embonpoint* voice,—

"I ought to have told you, Mr. Lancroft, that we're obliged to run away after dinner in order to take this young lady to a dance. This is another of my nieces, Miss Mabel Featherstone," and she nodded towards Mabel. The girl held out her hand, then half withdrew it, bowed and blushed a little. But Willie shook hands all the same: "or these two young ladies. It's a dreadful thing for an old woman like myself to have to do, isn't it?" And, as Mrs. Featherstone spoke, she looked towards the only other chaperon.

"I am quite capable of taking charge of them all," said the latter, a withered, sandy-haired blonde with a large nose, "and I promised Victoria Stonor to go, so I must," she said in rather a mincing voice.

"No, Lady Jane, I'll do my duty.

Mr. Lancroft, Lady Jane Blair." (Lady Jane bowed rather stiffly. Willie decided that she was the *amari aliquid* of that evening's entertainment.) "No, thank you, my dear, I'll do my duty. I'll see through it—see it through, I mean, as Maitland says."

Meanwhile Willie had gone up and shaken hands with Ela. They had exchanged letters twice since the previous autumn, originally on an astronomical question. But now they met again, their intimacy seemed to have grown by cubits, as it were in the dark.

"I want to hear what you've been doing lately in your work, Mr. Lancroft," Ela said, and she made a slight drawing in of her skirts to intimate that he might sit down beside her if he chose.

"What have you been doing? That's much more important," said Willie, taking the place offered.

"How can it be? I've been doing nothing but amuse myself."

"I feel convinced to the contrary."

"What else have I done, then?"

"Existed and been a joy for ever."

"For ever?"

"*Ja wohl.*"

"Well, I suppose I must take that as a compliment, mustn't I?"

"That's as you think. Take it as a verity, anyhow."

And at this moment Mrs. Featherstone said to Willie, "Will you take in my niece, Mr. Lancroft?"

"I'd rather you'd talk sensibly, if you don't mind," said Ela, while she unfolded her napkin. "I'm really very anxious to hear about the lecture which you are to give at the Royal Institution. Isn't that rather an opportunity?"

"Yes, I hope it may be. I've had a lot of things in my head that I wanted to say. But—" and he paused, not wishing to get egoistical.

"I know Maitland thought it would be a good thing for you to lecture there. He has a good deal to do with it, you know. Have you written it?"

"Just finished. The day before yesterday."

"When is it to be?"

"To-morrow week."

"In the evening?"

"Yes."

"I hope you intend to send me a ticket."

"If you care to have one, certainly."

"Now, isn't that rather silly, 'If you care to have one'?"

"Is it? I should be glad to think myself silly, anyhow."

"Well, when it was partly to hear you that I came up to town."

"Was it really? Well, I feel *profondément touché*. I only wish I was likely to be worthy of the audience."

"Do you know you are saying very *banal* things to-night?"

"Am I? Well, I feel idiotic—idiotically—in idiotically good spirits."

"I suppose because you've just finished your work," said Ela demurely.

"Finished my work—fudge."

"You said you'd just finished your work."

"And I said 'fudge' for that as a reason."

After all Lady Jane Blair had her uses. She kept up to Maitland such a constant stream of talk, devoted exclusively to herself and her immediate concerns, that, though there were only nine people at dinner, general conversation was impossible. Willie had no idea what was going on outside the charmed circle which included himself and his neighbour.

"Did you ever meet my cousin Mabel before?" said Ela, after she thought the conversation had gone on long enough in one vein. "Don't you think she's very pretty?" and she looked across the table. And though her cousin caught her glance she did not withdraw it. For she knew that Mabel would know, by the convention which obtains among women, that her cousin had been saying something "nice" about her. "You know she has just been presented?"

"No, I didn't know, I'm sorry to say. Yes, very pretty." Willie for his part had cast his eyes down directly Mabel looked up. . .

"I am sure," said Mrs. Featherstone at dessert, "that we could pack in Mr. Lancroft, if he cares to come with us to Mrs. Stonor's. We shall look more respectable bringing one pair of trousers, and not all petticoats."

"Oh, yes, do come," said both Ela and Mabel.

"I should like to, immensely." His face had already given a sufficient answer.

"Well, we shall be ready in half an hour," said Mrs. Featherstone as she left the room.

"There's more room in our carriage," said Lady Jane; "if Mr. Lancroft comes in that I shall be very pleased. We shall all get there together, you know." And that was how it was settled. A carriage is, for some reason, considered by right-minded persons not a suitable place for

flirtation; so the two young men, Willie Lancroft and Tom Blair, went together with one chaperon and the two girls with the other.

Maitland looked blank. "*Après tout ce que j'ai souffert,*" he said to Willie aside, trusting that Tom Blair would not hear or would not understand French.

. . . . .

They stopped at the door of the house in Eaton Place. Alternate flashes of light and darkness, as the carriage lamps shone on portions of the awning or just beyond it on a little group of pale faces robed in outer darkness; or as the lantern held by the watchman dazzled Willie's eyes when he alighted, and stood to help Lady Jane to do so too (it was terrible to be obliged to leave Tom Blair to do the like for the occupants of the other brougham); and again as the house-door, opening and closing, lit up for a moment light dresses and cloaks and now and again a gleam of diamonds. A minute, and he was inside the hall, amid a con-

fusion of men standing about near the cloak-room, of groups passing in and out of the tea-room on the ground floor, or among the flowers in the hall. The house, a cold miserable one for ordinary life, with its stone staircase, with all the comfort of the place sacrificed to get a respectable drawing-room and back drawing-room, now looked attractive enough, the hall filled with flowers, and the whole place alive with gay dresses and bright beautiful faces.

"How beautiful English people are!" Willie Lancroft said to himself, "both men and women."

But he felt a divine pity for everyone there except himself. Those other girls were beautiful—perhaps—well, no, taken individually, not quite that—pretty certainly. But Ela Featherstone was beautiful both within and without. . . .

. . . . .

"Do you want to dance?" said Willie, when he came up for his second engagement to Ela. The first time dancing was

almost obligatory, the room was so empty.

"No. I don't think I do," said Ela. "The room's getting very hot, isn't it?"

"And, you see, we're still in time to get that seat in the conservatory."

There was a tiny little conservatory which bulged out over a side street, and was made picturesque to-night by ferns and Japanese lanterns.

"It's delicious being in here," said Willie. "You can see, without being seen."

"How pretty it all looks," said Ela. But she emitted just the ghost of a sigh. "You've been dancing with my cousin, I hope!"

"Oh, yes. You see I had the luck to be early. I suppose she's filled up now."

"I hope she's having a good time. It's rather important for a girl to go down well at first, you know."

"I should think she's sure to go down. And then, I suppose," Willie went on, with the curious acuteness which he

sometimes showed about other people's concerns, as a contrast to much dreaminess and blundering about his own, "Mrs. Featherstone would feel herself rather responsible if she didn't have a good time this season."

"Yes. That's just it. Aunt Cécile is so wonderfully good-natured."

"She's more than good-natured, I should say; she's kind-hearted," said Willie with enthusiasm.

"Yes, I meant that. There's a difference, isn't there? I had almost forgotten how nice she was till I stayed with her this time. You know her pretty well, don't you?"

"Oh, no. But somehow you can see what she is like in her face."

"Yes. She's so genuine; they both are. That's what makes them such pleasant people to live with," and once more she heaved the ghost of a sigh.

"It must be. I think Mai—Featherstone is about the best specimen of

humanity I ever 'struck'—as we used to say in Paris."

"What does that mean, 'struck'?"

"Oh! lighted upon, like 'struck oil,' don't you know. I've seen a good deal of him and heard a good deal about him, too, and I should say he was one of those sort of people who never disappoint you, are never found wanting, if you understand what I mean."

"In some ways Maitland's rather severe," she began.

"Severe, is he? Well, I've never found that out."

"Well, that's not the right word. And I don't suppose he would be with you, because, you see, you've done things. But critical, don't you know. . . . I don't believe he likes women," she said, after a pause.

"Oh! I'm sure he likes you, and thinks a lot of you, as, indeed, everybody would," said Willie, speaking with a genuine wish to save misconceptions, but not too wisely.

"Oh, I don't mean that," Ela answered, with a shade of hauteur. "I mean, he doesn't believe that women are much good. How much nicer it is to be a man," and for the third time Ela sighed.

"No; I don't see that in the least."

"You do really, you know. There never was any man who wasn't glad he wasn't a woman."

As she said this Ela, looking at her companion, became involuntarily flooded with a woman's admiration of Willie Lancroft's solid build, of the not less solid, pondering face, which (as has been said) had always a sense of power in it. She was in a humble frame of mind, dissatisfied with herself—a thing not common with Ela Featherstone—the outcome of the different atmosphere in which she had been living while at Portland Place. Nothing was quite right. They didn't make enough of her at Maitland's, and Ela was used to being made much of. But then at home—She

had time for these reflections, or half thoughts, and for a number of others which were half sensations as Willie paused in his reply, and before he raised his blue eyes to hers with their gentle, almost timid look of dog-like fidelity and admiration.

"They wouldn't own to wishing it, if they did, no doubt," he said, after a pause. "I really don't know what the truth of the matter is. Certainly men affect to like the brutal virtues best—in themselves. They like to possess, or think they possess, the others by proxy. Do you know that's one of the things (it seems odd) that make Featherstone such an all-round chap, and yet at the same time make him, well, quite indifferent to the other sex, you know. Yes, I never saw that before," he went on, getting more and more confused in speech as he more and more followed the train of his own thought. "It's just what Aristophanes says in the Symposium—"

"What was that?" said Ela, not at all

liking this sudden excursus into an unknown territory. She spoke a little sharply.

Willie looked up rather blankly. "I f—forget," he stammered, "the exact words. I—I'll explain it some day," he went on. "It's curious. I haven't thought it out."

"All the same," said Ela, who preferred sticking to her own subject, "I would give anything to be a man. Think how nice it is for men like you and Maitland to be able to make a name for yourselves, women—"

"I am not to be mentioned in the same week as your cousin." And Willie said this with a genuineness which was unmistakable.

"He thinks a great deal of you," said Ela, in a voice in which she but rarely spoke, which had in its tones something of a caress. And again her companion looked her in the face with passionate eyes that said more than speech.

"After all," said Willie, after a

moment's pause, "there's a good deal of humbug talked about the advantage of work and that sort of thing—I mean, in what real work consists. Somebody says that the test of an artist is in what he leaves out, or something like that. And the same rule applies to life, which is a sort of work of art, too; and all that feverish anxiety for doing things, making money and that kind of thing, is no more good than idleness."

"But I don't see how that affects the difference between men and women."

"Nor do I precisely," he answered with a smile. "I was rather following out a train of thought. But it does apply. I mean that—well," he went on in a slightly hang-dog fashion, "I suppose at the back of my mind I was thinking something like what Milton said when he was blind: 'They also serve who only stand and wait.'"

"Ah, well, Milton meant waiting for Paradise, or something of that sort, didn't he? I suppose a good many

people would think they would have to wait a long time for that," said Ela.

"Oh, yes. I don't go in for that, whether you believe in Paradise or not, and I don't know in the least what you do believe."

"What do you?"

"I guess—I probably believe more than I think I do; most of us do."

"Yes, perhaps. But, you see, you say you guess. That's like everybody—"

"Hallo!" said a voice, peering into the semi-darkness. "Is that you, Ela?" It came from a lady, who had a tall man immediately behind her. "I didn't expect to find you in town so early."

The lady was a certain Lady Joyce, rather an ally of Ela Featherstone's. The previous spring Lady Joyce had had an interesting but somewhat severe feminine illness, and had scarcely shown at all, so that Willie had never met her before. "Well," she went on heartily; "it's delightful to think we've got you back again."

Willie Lancroft was presented to Lady Joyce, and she found that she had still one spare place on her card. Lady Joyce was decidedly pretty, and, as he found, a good talker after a fashion, and knew everybody into the bargain. Yet Willie felt that somehow the evening had changed its character since her appearance.

He got an extra from Ela, in addition to the three dances on her card, and this, like the two last dances, they sat out. This dance involved, too, his taking her in to supper. But Ela's mood, which changed quickly, was not now the same.

Before the dance they had tried the supper-room, and found it full. Now at last they found a place. Ela nodded to one or two people as she passed.

"I thought you knew Mrs. Amberley," she said.

"Mrs. Amberley? Yes. Is she here?" Willie answered, vaguely. He was looking about for a place at one of

the tables and hoping they might find two vacancies.

"Why, yes, I was speaking to her at the table we passed a moment ago."

They got a seat. Two strangers were at the same table. They were exchanging reminiscences of parties at which they had met lately, and these were evidently smartish ones, in spite of the earliness of the season. It was clear, too, that the woman was married, and to be gathered that her husband was not there that evening. They were so intimate and talked so much, that they were barely aware of the arrival of the new-comers.

It was not so easy for Willie and Ela to get anything to eat. But yet Willie seemed, to his companion, a trifle too *empressé* in his anxiety to supply her wants. He had already got up once to get her some bread; now he did so a second time to get a bottle of champagne.

When he came back a pretty little brunette was just installing herself in his place.

"Is it?" she was saying, in answer to Ela's attempted suggestion that the place was taken. "But I shall faint if I don't get something. How are you, dear?" she went on, for she knew Ela Featherstone. "Now I won't allow you to stay and wait on me, Lord Ardingford. Ela Featherstone and I can manage for ourselves very well."

Willie came back at that moment and Ela introduced him to Mrs. Mähresheim.

"I'm afraid I've stolen your place, Mr. Lancroft," she said, looking up with an air of sham deprecation, her eyes twinkling. "But I really should have died if I hadn't; so you'll forgive me, I know."

"Oh, it's all right. . . . May I give you some champagne?" Willie said, when he had helped Ela. "You haven't got a glass, have you?" And he went to get one.

"Thanks; you're too good," she said, when he returned, "heaping coals of fire on my head in this way. There's still room, if you could get a chair."

Willie looked about rather vaguely. "Can you get me a chair?" he said, to one of the servants who passed.

"I'll try, sir." But the man hurried away on another mission.

"What shall I get you now?" Willie said to Ela. She thought him too easy-going.

"Get yourself a chair, first," she said, in a voice which was not the voice which she had had in the conservatory, but had returned to the feminine staccato of polite society.

"Oh, yes; I will in a minute," he said.

"You serve and stand and wait, too," she said, instinctively anxious to efface the impression of her earlier seriousness.

Willie gave a start of surprise. It was almost as if he had received a blow, and a flush passed rapidly over his face. But he recovered himself immediately. "That was a very masculine kind of joke," he said, with a good-natured laugh. "I said you need never be afraid of being

confounded with the 'average woman.'"
Ela's mood then changed again.

"Some day you must tell me what good women are in the world," she said. But the impression had gone: Willie had become the rather boyish man of ordinary life.

"You think me a masculine woman, then?" said Ela, looking at him, presently, over her ice-spoon.

"No, just the right mixture," he said, heartily, and without a shade of resentment.

But, to himself, he said, on his way home, alone: "I wish I had said *nicer* things when we were talking in the conservatory. Women expect you to do that. That's the worst of me: I'm not half sharp enough — especially when people get on a serious discussion."

## CHAPTER XIV.

Ela that night would have preferred to sit alone in her room and think. It had been a long evening—long in the sense of being very eventful. She would like to disentangle it all. At any rate she said to herself that that was what she would have liked. She knew that this was not to be thought of; for even after commonplace evenings Mabel always came into her room to discuss the events of the day. To think of shutting her out was to meditate an outrage upon all the conventions which obtain among girls. And in fact the maid had scarcely taken off and put away Ela's dress, when her cousin knocked at the door.

"You can go now, Parker," said Ela, and Parker went, let us hope, to bed.

"Well, it was a nice dance, wasn't it Ela?" said Mabel, throwing herself sideways upon her cousin's bed. Her ball-dress had been exchanged for an electric-blue dressing-gown, prettily fringed with lace about the throat, and with many meaningless pendant ribbons. The flowers had gone from her hair, which now fell, not very thickly, about her shoulders. Her male admirers of that evening would have been surprised to see what a moderate supply of hair it was that had made so goodly a show. But she still looked pretty in her blue dressing-gown, setting off her fair childish face. She had a face like an angel of Fra Angelico, as to the upper part, at least; the lower was less agreeable.

"Did you dance everything?" she went on. "I did; all but one. Only one was with Freddy Hamon, and he dances so badly that I said I was tired and sat down most of the time. And I

sat out one with Captain Oliver. Who is he, Ela? He's rather fun, don't you think so? He made me laugh so about the Mildmays going to Sandown Park last week. We met him there with the Mildmays, you know. He said—let me see, I forget exactly how he put it; only you know Lady Griddleton wanted him to drive her all the way back. And he was trying to get out of it. . . . Well, it doesn't matter, I don't think I could explain how he said it, now. I feel too sleepy and stupid. . . . Who did you dance with, Ela?" she said, jumping off the bed and going to the dressing-table where she took a long survey of herself in the glass. . . . "Let's look at your card. I don't think I like Lord Ardingford much, do you? Who did you think was the best looking man in the room?" and as she said this, she gazed once more earnestly at her reflection, this time in the large mirror. "I suppose you'd say Freddy Hamon was, wouldn't you? I think he would be if he had a moustache.

I don't think any man can be really handsome without a moustache. Perhaps you don't think so, do you?" And, as she said this, she sat her little self down on Ela's knees and put one arm round her neck. She still held Ela's programme in her other hand.

"I don't think I care about moustaches. They're supposed to be—"

"Nice to kiss. Rather. At least, I should think so. Now that shows what a humbug you are! Because Proby's got a splendid moustache, and you pretend you don't know what it's like."

"Oh, your brother! That's nothing! So's papa got a moustache if you come to that, and Uncle Arthur, too."

"Who's Mr. Lancroft, Ela, who came to dinner?" said Mabel, who was now looking at her cousin's programme; "I saw him once before."

"Oh! he's a friend of mine," the other answered.

"But he's one of Maitland's friends,

too, isn't he? I suppose he does something clever, doesn't he?"

That was how they all spoke, in the family, of Maitland's friends; without any diminution of respect for Maitland, but with no superfluity of it at the service of his friends.

"Yes; you must have seen his name. He writes stories, you know."

"Writes books, does he? How clever! But he doesn't look so very old. Do you like him?"

"Yes, I do, very much," Ela said; and she made a little movement with her knee, as if Mabel were becoming too heavy.

"He's too clever for me, I expect; at least, I'm too stupid for him."

To this remark Ela made no reply.

"I say, Ela!" said Mabel, suddenly. She had got up only to settle herself once more in her cousin's lap; "when are you going to get married?"

"Oh! I don't know; some day, I suppose," and Ela, to her annoyance, blushed

a little. It was ridiculous to blush before this child.

"Will you swear you're not mashed on anybody — Captain Vansittart, for instance? He's the handsomest man I know, by long chalks. Only I *don't* know him, and he would not look at me."

"Nor at me, either, as far as that goes. Besides, I don't think I care for those beauty men. It doesn't wear well."

"That's just it. Aren't you like that? When I'm at a dance like this, I feel as if there were half-a-dozen people I should like to marry. But the next morning I feel all different. Don't you know what *sort* of man you'd like to marry, Ela?"

"Why, of course I can imagine the sort of man."

"Oh! I don't mean that. Of course, whenever one lies awake at night, one imagines a sort of man to marry. I used to, at least. But I've rather given that up now. It's best only to think about

*real* people. I used to think I cared most about men being tall and handsome and all that, don't you know! But I'm quite sure now it's best to get them jolly and with some fun in them. Don't you?"

"Like Captain Oliver, then?"

"Yes; Captain Oliver's all right. But he'd be better if he hadn't such a round face."

"But the men who have some fun in them, generally have round faces, I've noticed."

"No! Have you? Well, perhaps you're right. I dare say you'd soon get used to that—I like his moustaches, don't you? But then, you know, Captain Oliver's got no money. I believe he's only got four or five hundred a year."

"You couldn't have much fun on that. (Why did I say that?" Ela said to herself, "only because everybody else does.")

"No, of course you couldn't. I should hate to marry a poor man, shouldn't you? Much better not marry at all. I wonder

whether Rose Dennyson will ever get married. You know she's thirty next birthday, I believe. I thought she looked awfully handsome to-night, didn't you? That spangly frock suited her immensely. It was Indian, I suppose—wasn't it? I say, Ela, I liked your frock no end!"

"Did you? Thanks. How nicely Elise did your hair. I believe it's best to have a French maid, if you can. They're so much cleverer with their fingers."

"Yes; I think they are. . . . Yes, I think that is rather a nice way. And it was so odd that those roses just exactly matched the colour of my dress. The outside ones were just the colour of the frock, and the others of the petticoat. Do you know, Captain Oliver thought one of them was a *Maréchal Niel*; wasn't that absurd? I asked him if it was likely that I should wear a yellow dress and red petticoat. And he said he'd never noticed that they matched like that. It shows what idiots men are, doesn't it?

And afterwards, when we were sitting down, he said that he should always make his roses match the clocks on his socks. You know, it was Elise's idea to have the overskirt caught up like that."

"Well, I think it was awfully pretty."

"Where did you get that piece of lace you had round your throat, Ela? I was looking at it all dinner-time."

"It's some old Brussels that belonged to my grandmother Russell. She gave it me the year I came out."

"I say!" Mabel said, becoming *distraite*, and running a ribbon through her fingers, as she sat on her cousin's knee. "I know there was something I wanted to say. Oh! it was about Rose Dennyson! You know she plays most beautifully, and I've heard that she once got mashed on a German or Italian or something, who taught her the violin."

"Yes; I've heard that story, too," said Ela."

"Have you? Then perhaps it's true.

That would account for her not going down, as far as getting married goes, if a lot of people know it, wouldn't it? It was Beatrice Keatinge who told me. She said" . . . and Mabel dropped her voice at this point, at which our muse is not permitted to listen.

"Fancy anybody being so stupid!" was Ela's not very moral comment. "But if Bee Keatinge says it, it probably isn't true."

"Then you'd never heard that part?" said Mabel, in an awestruck voice.

"I—I don't think so," said the other, and there was a minute's pause.

"I say, you ought to be getting married, soon!" said Mabel. "Do you know the only way to find out whether anyone will do or won't do? Try and imagine what you'd feel if they put both arms round you and kissed you six times. That's what Bee Keatinge said to me."

"That's just the sort of thing she would say."

"Well, I think it's very sensible.

Kissing you once is nothing. No: I think she said you were to fancy yourself sitting on his knee, and his kissing you six times."

"That's disgusting!"

"Well, perhaps it is, rather. But I don't know, I'm sure. Let me see. It's queer. But I can't imagine Fred Hamon kissing anyone, somehow; can you?"

"I've never tried."

"But try now. You must try, Ela, or you'll never get married. Try Captain Vansittart. Shut your eyes!"

And before Ela had time to prevent her Mabel kissed her violently on the mouth.

"Don't. You're disgusting!" and she shook her cousin off her knees.

Mabel only laughed.

"Then try Mr. Lancroft. I say, you blushed scarlet. I believe it's a case. Do tell me more about him. Is he in society and all that?"

"Oh, no, not exactly."

"Maitland's people aren't as a rule, are

they? . . Of course I was only chaffing when I said 'it's a case.' . . Aunt Cécile's awfully kind though," she went on rather inconsequently. "Still, I hope Aunt Marion's coming to town soon. She is, isn't she? . . Dear me, how cold it is. We've actually let the fire go out. Won't you come into my room and get a warm; or sleep with me? Do! Will you?"

"No, I think not."

"With this chatterbox? Not for the world," Ela thought.

"I shall get into bed in two twos, that's all. Good-night, dear."

They kissed and parted.

When Mabel had gone, Ela looked disconsolately at the ashes. A great deal seemed to have gone out with them.

Then she got into bed. All the events of the evening rushed through her head. But the thing which remained longest with her was Willie Lancroft's good-natured smile as he said, "Well, you need not be afraid of being too feminine," or something like that.

And suddenly she vindicated her claim to be considered a woman by incontinently bursting into tears.

. . . . .

A few days after this Willie had the good fortune to bring Ela Featherstone home in a hansom from a show at the Burlington Club, for which he had got tickets to take Mrs. Featherstone and Ela. Mrs. Featherstone at the last moment could not go; Mabel was on a visit to a friend.

As they were coming home in the hansom,—

"I—I ought not to have said what I did the other night at supper!" Ela said, suddenly, rather timidly; and this timidity gave her a new and exquisite grace.

"What?" said Willie, though he thought he knew.

"About Milton. But if you've forgotten it doesn't matter."

"Oh, no, I hadn't forgotten. I've never forgotten anything you said."

"Now, that's absurd."

"I believe it's perfectly true."

"I saw that you thought me very frivolous. (I wish I hadn't used that stupid word," Ela said to herself.) "Profane, I mean."

"No, I didn't. I thought what I think now—"

Ela did not ask what.

"That you are *la perfection même*," he said, seriously.

"That's more absurd than what you said before," she replied.

But she thought how stuffy London was. She felt that her cheeks were hot, and she looked out with an eager longing for the corner of Portland Place. And, thank God, they had reached the Langham.

"I'm afraid I've dropped my purse. Oh, no, here it is. That's all right. (Thank heaven we are almost at the door. Now !) Thank you so much for bringing me home, Mr. Lancroft," she said, in her kindest and yet most natural voice. And she gave a slight return to the pressure of Willie's hand. "*Au revoir!* On Friday, if not before. Thanks *so* much."

## CHAPTER XV.

Every writer should be a *teacher* or he was a quack. It was Carlyle or somebody who had said that. It was clear to Willie that he had that faculty, a faculty he had not suspected in himself, of preaching sermons. And he referred this, as he referred every good gift which he possessed, to Ela Featherstone. How angelic she had been when he took her home from Savile Row the other day! Now the debt to the world which he felt he owed for his happiness and unspeakable good fortune oppressed him less. He had, it has been said, silently abandoned the intention he once entertained of devoting at least a part of his time and pains and influence to alleviating a little

of that misery which he had learned to know. (His invention itself had been sterile these six months; though he had enough old material to keep the magazines going, and his name before the public.) This lecture struck him as in some sort an expiation. Preaching sermons would be an easier—"and more profitable," said a voice deep down in his heart—way of clearing off the scores he owed to the world, than the ways he had once thought of.

Charlie was staying with him. He had read the lecture over to her, and she was enraptured with it; rather too enraptured, Willie thought upon consideration. There was an absence in her of that reflective criticism, the going over particular points and making of suggestions and observations thereon, which he valued in her appreciations. The High-school mistress of Hilstone was in reality not a person whose judgment could be slighted by anyone who knew her. Willie could not determine whether it were because

Charlie had, alas ! become less important to him, or whether she were really different ; but certainly those long breakfast-table and evening discussions which he used to prize so much—for they were generally discussions of his own writings —were lacking in vigour this time.

An unaccountable thing was that, after the two had gone one day to lunch at Portland Place, Charlie had come back full of interest in Mrs. Featherstone, but had very little to say about Ela. If he could have only made up his mind to tell her everything! He had been waiting to see if they would take to each other, and he was obliged to own that they did not seem to have done it to any appreciable degree. This, it must be confessed, lowered Charlie in her brother's eyes, and made him doubt her judgment. Charlie didn't look as if she would ever have an *affaire* of her own ; she was too frank somehow to be in love. And Willie tried to appreciate his sister from an outside point of view. She was certainly good-

looking enough—decidedly pretty, and exceedingly young-looking for her age, at any rate here when she threw off all the weight of High-school mistressship. And after all she was only twenty-eight; Ela herself could not be very far from that. Therefore she was only just beyond the age of perfection for womankind. Charlie had lost the full richness of her colour since she had been obliged to pass her life amid smoke instead of the sea air of her home. But on the whole it was wonderful what a complexion she kept, her brother thought, and how bright her eyes were.

And strangely enough—were it not that love is the most egoistical thing on earth—Willie never even guessed that a new figure had appeared above Charlie's horizon—a certain University-extension lecturer, who had paid two visits to those northern regions of smoke; and that he was the cause of a rejuvenescence in Charlie, of which her brother was half-conscious, and the cause too that her interest in

Willie and in his literary life was one shade less keen than it used to be.

The Maitland-Featherstones had asked Willie and Charlie to dine there this evening of the lecture; but the brother and sister preferred to remain quietly at home. Willie rightly thought that if Charlie should again fail to be fascinated by Ela, or still worse, if she should make a bad impression on the latter, it would be a dangerous strain on his nerves.

For half an hour after dinner they sat talking with rather an affected calmness, not about the lecture itself, but about literary ideas which it suggested. Then Alberta (so was the servant called) came to announce that the hansom was at the door. Willie felt a tightening of the heart-strings; Charlie turned a little pale and with nervous fingers hurried on her cloak. . . .

There was the horse stamping on the wet asphalte. On going out of the door, Willie turned his face a moment to the south, and saw from far off the lights

from the other side of the river blinking through the misty rain. The river itself was not visible, but, to the imagination, all the more visible flowing below. At once an intense longing seized upon him to be on some barge steering silently out towards the sea. To his fancy the scent of the sea air was already in his nostrils, as he passed down wide reaches with low, black river-banks hardly visible.

This was what his life had brought him to!—since that journey to Paris long ago. A stupid exhibition of himself before a stupid crowd.

Adam Street is one of the shortest in London, but Willie Lancroft had thought all these thoughts and many more before he reached the top of it and emerged, as it seemed, into an unfamiliar world. A glare of light was in his eyes from the moment they started, and now that they had turned the corner, lights were gleaming, black figures were passing and crossing in all directions. And all this,

now he came to think of it, was some part of the ceremony he had to go through that evening—he had forgotten himself quite what the ceremony was. But it certainly was something which made the world a more exciting place than it had been before.

Suddenly the lights stopped, and they were in a dark squalid street, and all Willie Lancroft's pleasure in anticipation turned to a sick dread. . . . And now they were in a crowded street again, whirling down Piccadilly. . . . No time to think now or remember anything. . . . Charlie and he had not exchanged one word. . . . And now they were in Albemarle Street itself, the solemn, threatening street. . . .

Their cab stopped. There was quite a row of cabs and carriages in front, and, as Willie paid the cabman, he saw a little bevy of people just going in at the door. What had they come to see? A reed shaken by the wind? . . . . It was a conspiracy to make a fool of

him. What did he care for them, or they for him? But those bargemen out there in the wet night, driving seawards. *That* was reality! *That* was worth living! A curse on all shows—all lecturing.

Now the strings about his heart tightened still more, almost to the point of pain. It was terrible as a single combat against a host. For his paper was full of contentious matter. It would have been easy to adapt himself to the tastes and prejudices of his audience. But this he felt unworthy of the mission which had been laid upon him. But if he failed?

> "But screw your courage to the sticking-place,
> And we'll not fail."

Yes; that was fine enough for a quotation. But it did not help one much in this crisis. Well, the time was up, he must go in.

Circles above circles of white faces, no bodies visibly attached to them, and in front of these a green table. This

was all that he saw. It seemed to him that all the strength of his nerves was required to walk naturally to that table; that if he got once there, he could breathe. A plague upon it. The people were applauding—what? What had he come to do? . . . . Well, at any rate, here the table was. How curious the green baize felt; he had never noticed what a curious warm sensation it gave out. There was comfort in it. If his business there could only be confined to passing his hand up and down the green baize cloth! . . . . But it couldn't unluckily. . . . . Well, here was his manuscript unfolded before him. He felt glad that he knew these opening sentences by heart; and he felt glad, too, now he came to think of it, that his lecture was full of this contentious matter. Anything better than *banal* applause. He *would* pull himself together—in a moment.

But he began, almost mechanically,—

(It was not so long after Carlyle's death, but that the storm which raged

round the name of the great man, after the publication of the *Reminiscences* and the *Life*, was still remembered.)

"A great writer who has not very long since left us (he began), and who, not inappropriately I think, for the Titan that he was, sank from sight in rather a stormy sky, was wont to be especially severe upon that branch of literature which I am here to-night to defend." ("Confounded long sentence," he said, to himself.) "In his fine and justly-renowned Edinburgh address, Carlyle warned the young students to whom he was speaking, away from that branch of art. 'You will be surprised,' he said, 'if you come to think of it, how near fiction comes to lying!'

"This is a very severe saying. Carlyle, you know, was apt to express himself emphatically when he thought strongly. That iron vigour of speech, is, in my poor judgment, not a fault, but one of his choicest attributes.

"And yet our author himself could

hardly have intended his condemnation of fiction for a universal one. He certainly did not mean his strictures to apply to all branches of creative art; albeit of all creative art it is true, in a sense, that it comes near to lying. If Carlyle had thought that among his auditors there sat an embryo Homer he would not have warned him away from his bent; nor an embryo Æschylus or Sophocles. Perhaps, however, he would have said that Homer was an historian: for one may be an historian and yet record only fictitious history, provided one believes it to be true. And he might have said the same with still more justification of the Greek dramatists; and (coming down to a later age in the history of literature), he might perhaps have said the same even of Dante. But at that point, at any rate, he would have been obliged to stop. He could not allege that Shakespeare supposed that all the stories that he tells were true stories, that all the people he describes

really lived. And yet, you never find Carlyle saying that Shakespeare's art is a kind of lying. On the contrary, he says that there is nobody so true as Shakespeare; and, of his historical plays, he says that they are the only history, worth anything, which we possess.

"Therefore it is quite clear that Carlyle could not have meant his strictures to apply to all fiction as such—for that would be practically to condemn all creative art.

"It is not, in truth, the judgment of men of the character and temper of Carlyle, by which fiction stands most menaced, from which she has most to fear. The sentence of Carlyle which I have just quoted only utters more frankly and severely (but in his case with a special aim) what I am convinced an immense number of people think more urbanely, because less vehemently, than he did, concerning fiction—less vehemently, but with a far wider application; nay, what is, I doubt, in danger of becom-

ing the current popular judgment upon, not what we call fiction only, but upon all the creative arts—that they are *akin* to lying. And if the vast number of people who hold this view are still inclined to give the creative arts a certain indulgent place in their scheme of life, they do so at the bottom of their hearts, upon the ground that a little lying is necessary to the movement of that machine we call human society. Lying, they would say, is not a motive force; it has no propelling power in itself, but it is the oil which lubricates the machinery; and, as it affects thereby an economy of force, it is as valuable as if it were itself a motor. That, for instance, is, so far as I can understand him, the view which M. Rénan takes with regard to Christianity. (I use this only as an illustration," Willie said, knitting his brows, for there was a slight dissentient murmur at this point. And at the same time he recognized with pleasure that he had now got full control over his nerves and over his

thoughts. "He looks like Danton," Ela said to herself, at that moment, with a thrill of admiration.)

"I doubt (the lecturer went on)—no, I do not doubt, I feel sure—that this opinion concerning what I will call creative fiction—latent or distinctly formulated—is very largely represented in the present assembly; an opinion, if not so trenchant as Carlyle's, of (as I have said) far wider scope and application.

"For what Carlyle really thought or meant to say about fiction was only what he thought about speech itself. He warned people—in thirty-eight volumes, as it is the custom to remind us—to keep away from speech. He only meant insincere speech. And when he warned the Edinburgh students to keep away from fiction, he only meant insincere fiction.

"But this other opinion, which reaches out much farther than Carlyle's, raises the question whether any fiction can be sincere.

"This last opinion is the scientific view of things, natural to men whose lives are devoted to scientific pursuits, and it is for that reason that I say it is likely to be largely represented here. But is it a true view of life as a whole? That is what we have to consider.

"Now, the fact is, there are two kinds of truth and two kinds of falsehood—there is scientific truth and untruth, and there is æsthetic truth and untruth—there is the truth of fact and the truth of emotion; and it is quite likely that a person, who has very clear ideas as to what constitutes one kind of veracity, may not be equally clear concerning the other kind. The grief of a paid mourner, the simulated anger of a rhetorician, are lies quite as distinctly as misstatements on matters of fact. Both these kinds are intentional lies. But there may be—in either field, the scientific or the æsthetic—other untruths which are uttered in perfect good faith, in all sincerity of conviction, but which are not a bit more true

on that account. It is false that the sun goes round the earth, though all mankind a few hundred years ago thought, in the most perfect good faith, that it did so; and it is equally false—though a majority of two to one of the English speaking race should, in perfect good faith think the contrary—that Longfellow is as great a poet as Shakespeare, or even as Wordsworth or Keats. There must, in these matters of feeling, and hence in matters of art, be a true and a false, as much as there must be a true and a false in matters of fact. And therefore there is just as much a line of distinction to be drawn between sincere and insincere fiction as between sincere and insincere science.

"And remember that it is no answer to this contention that the criterion between true and false is, in the case of æsthetics or of art, difficult to find; it would not be an argument against it if it were impossible to find a criterion between the two. I mean that there would still

*be* a true and a false in art, independent of what people at any age might suppose to be the truth of art; just as there was a true and a false view about the motion of the earth four hundred years ago as much as there is to-day, though at the former time to know the true view was impossible.

"And this fact brings me at once to the subject which has given its title to this lecture, 'Realism in Fiction.' 'Realism' is a word which has been used and understood in any number of different ways and senses. But, so far as I understand 'realism,' I mean by the word merely reality and sincerity in art—an attempt to present things as they seem to you to *be*. So long as you hold that fiction is at best only a form of lying, then, I grant you, the ideas of realism, reality, sincerity will be strange and meaningless in this connection. There will be no harm to you, then, in the repetition of the outworn tricks of the trade, re-introducing the old stage characters, the old orthodox *dénouements*. Creative art is,

you hold, only meant to grease the machinery of life, to make it pass more agreeably; and whatever gives a momentary pleasure is for you a legitimate form of art. But if you believe that there is a distinction between sincere and insincere art, then you will find that once you have become convinced that things in life do not happen in the old stagey way, it will be impossible for you to go on pretending that they do. . . ."

This, the first part of the lecture, was argumentative only. But from this point the lecturer passed on to the æsthetic attractions offered respectively by realism and romance. It was for this part that he had invoked the inspiration of Ela's picture, and at other times of whisky and water. For it went on to describe the immense *wealth* which the new school of realistic writers promised in time to accumulate for the world.

He first spoke of the squandering habits of the romancists—the impossibly brave and virtuous heroes, the immaculate

heroines. Nothing can be worse for the mind, he maintained, than the indulgence of idle fancy, and nothing is better for it than the exercise of a healthy imagination. It is only the former that enervates the moral nature. "It has been said, among other things, that pity for imaginary sufferings only deadens the sympathies. I believe this assertion to be entirely false. Have you considered, in this connection, the history of the work which may be considered the first great effort towards realism in fiction, the first great reaction against romanticism which the modern world has seen? I mean *Don Quixote*. Up to Cervantes' day, vague romance, without character, devoid of real personalities, created, that is to say, without the effort of sincere imagination, had it all its own way. Women without occupation, men who were set free from the rough, energetic life of an earlier time, found their solace in these stories of impossible heroes and immaculate heroines. The heroes were not in

reality heroes at all; for most of these men, like Amadis de Gaul, had received fairy gifts, irresistible swords, impregnable armour, which quite took away any sort of equality between them and their opponents—made their conduct, indeed, as we should say, thoroughly unsportsmanlike.

"These were the characters on whom the readers that I have described loved to dwell. And now, where are they all gone? Well; I am afraid some of them have had a stunted sort of recrudescence in the pages of more modern romance-writers. But what of the real creation of that age—Don Quixote? Is it not almost certain that Cervantes knew some living character, like enough to Don Quixote, to serve for the model of his hero? Is it not true again that in drawing this character, he has discovered for us a new kind of worth in human nature; and does not this discovery constitute an immeasurable debt, which the world owes to realistic fiction?"

It was true that at present the realists were more engaged in gathering ore, than in refining it. But could not one foresee what might be done with it when the refining process had taken place?

And then he gave some pictures from the contemporary realists—a picture of a great barrack of workmen's dwellings; of a mere common café; of a body of light females out for a day in the country; all the unlikeliest subjects at first sight—as the best examples of the wealth which they were realizing to-day, which they were gradually and unostentatiously accumulating towards a future age; when, as we may reasonably hope, mankind, having conquered its present troubles—religious and social—its doubts and difficulties and despairs, and with a larger horizon before it, an ampler air to breathe, would be able to reap its full benefit.

And finally, in an appealing strain, he said that it depended most of all upon ourselves, whether we found the world dull, commonplace, sordid, mean; or

instinct with a mysterious life, which it was the highest achievement of the artist to make perceptible to us, and worth all his pains to reproduce in any degree and in the narrowest field. The narrower the field, the greater his self-denial; and if he achieved any measure of success, the greater his praise. The only sure way never to receive any of this pulse of vitality, was to shut our minds against the sources whence it came, to make no effort to realize its force, because an effort had to be made.

In the best of senses it was true for everyone, and this, not for inanimate nature only, but for human nature too, for all the world in fine, that,—

"We receive but what we give,
And in our life alone does nature live:
Ours is her wedding garment, ours her shroud!
And would we aught behold of higher worth
Than that inanimate cold world allowed
To the poor, loveless, ever anxious crowd,
Then from the soul itself must issue forth
A light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud
Enveloping the earth;
And from the soul itself must there be sent
A sweet and potent voice of its own birth,
Of all sweet sounds the life and element."

Thus ended this lecture on which Willie Lancroft had expended so much thought and pains. Now, though it was good enough in itself, and was really in some respects a great effort, it was very ill-adapted for the audience and the occasion. The people who came to the Royal Institution on a Friday evening, were used to something distinctly post-prandial. They wanted something light and chatty, with a good story thrown in here and there, with not too close a connection between the parts, so that if they nodded off once or twice, they could still catch the drift and enjoy it. They asked for the lightest of bread, and he had given them a compact argument, heavy as a stone, and after it an exalted strain of rhetoric—a sort of sermon.

And if Willie Lancroft had been himself in a less exalted condition of mind, he would have been the first person to recognize his mistake.

What actually happened, was, that when they found they were being treated

to Carlyle and an argument, the majority of the old gentlemen in the first row began to grow languid. Some others, gathering that the author was having a fling at science, stiffened and determined to let him severely alone. On the whole, however, his contentious matter fell very flat. The majority simply abstracted their attention, many dozed, and one, a good-natured-looking old gentleman, with white hair, audibly snored. A fair proportion of the audience, of whom the majority were ladies, applauded at the end; and the benign old gentleman awoke and smiled blandly on the lecturer as he clapped his stick on the floor.

Willie, for his part, noticed little or nothing of the reception which he got at the end. Many people came and shook hands with him; but some of them he thought went away rather hurriedly after doing so. Maitland was quite hearty and unembarrassed in his congratulations.

"Very good, my dear fellow," he said, "very good indeed. You really were

quite eloquent, you know. Some of the fellows didn't seem to catch on quite enough, I thought. It was just a shade too much of a sermon ; that was the only fault. You can't convince an analytical chemist of sin, you know."

And Mrs. Featherstone expressed the same idea when the three, she, Ela, and Maitland, were driving back in the carriage.

"Oh, yes," she said. "It was too like a sermon. It is drôle. 'Grattez l'Anglais et vous trouvez le *preacher*.' I've always noticed that." Then she remembered that Ela was by her side, so she went on, "But then I think he has something *évangélique* in his face, your Willie Lancroft," she said to Maitland. "En tout cas je l'aime beaucoup ; c'est un cœur d'or."

"Yes," said Ela, softly, and let her mind wander into tender pleasant reveries. Mrs. Featherstone just touched her niece's hand. Ela did not withdraw hers, but she made no sign. She pre-

ferred, on the whole, that Willie should look like a Danton rather than an evangelist. But then, she thought, Danton would have compelled people to listen and applaud. That old gentleman with the round, good-natured face would not have gone to sleep with Danton in the tribune.

. . . . .

As for Willie Lancroft, when he entered his chambers again, the world seemed once more to have become as it was wont to be. What was the good of it all; wasn't it all bunkum? What was all this talk of a theory of life? He felt humbled and reproved by his conscience. A load of egoism fell from him. Who was he to talk to the people of this vast London, toiling, tramping about in the muddy streets under the gas-lamps and the rain? And who, too, were the people to whom he had come to talk this bunkum? "The representatives of the culture of the greatest city in the world," something like that they were to themselves and the penny-a-liners. Fudge!

Fudge—all except Ela Featherstone. She at least was genuine, absolutely genuine. He clung to that faith with the passion of a martyr. And Maitland too, Maitland was just as genuine; and he had found a friend who was all that a man should be. And he thought of Maitland Featherstone's, "You can't convince an analytical chemist of sin, you know." What a ring of common sense and sincerity! he thought. A touch of Hope too about that. How entirely he had ceased to concern himself about Hope of late! It was a pity. His fault perhaps. But then Ela. . . And this thought which was always the first with him was the last also.

## CHAPTER XVI.

"Nom d'un chien, veux-tu rester tranquille un instant!" cried Hope to Michelange, his model. They called him Michelange because of his broken nose. Hope pettishly dashed his brush into his water colours. Then, as he took it out, to put in a peasant sitting on an ale-house bench, he went on with his reflections.

His studio was now re-occupied after an interval of a year. It was a year since he had gone over to England, knowing that Thyrza had arrived there —but he would not think of that any more. . . .

How lonely it was here. Not one of his friends cared whether he was in Paris or not. (This was tolerably unreason-

able; because Hope had as yet gone to none of their usual haunts.) Damn his friends—so-called; they didn't care a curse about him. What a lonely beggar he was, after all! Battersby, Edith: they had become more and more impossible. Then Willie! He had *made* Willie —and yet. . . .

"Confound it!" he ejaculated. For a knock came at the door; and then a large head, with curly red-brown hair, getting thin at the top, and huge beard, protruded itself through the half-open door. It was followed by the body of the elder Mac.

This McMurrough was almost the only one remaining out of the original Paris set of six years ago, the time of Willie's first introduction to Paris; so rapid are the changes which time brings about in that shifting, nebulous artist society.

"Well, Lancroft," he said, in his half-Irish, half-Glasgow speech; "I dhid not know you were in town, man. Donkin said he seen ye passing the Café Trique, yesterday afternoon—"

"How are you, old man?" said Hope, putting his brush in his mouth to shake hands. "I've only just come back."

"Ye've got some dhark game on, I'll be bound—to astonish the boys. Where's ye worrk?"

"No, I'm not sending anything this year, except a few drawings."

"Y're not? . . . You're doing that well enough, anyhow," he said, seeing that a cloud had gathered on Hope's brow. "A trifle darker shadow under the shoulder blades 'ud do no harm. Eh, Michelange? Comment vart-il? Toujours d'emploi?"

"Oui, m'sieu; assez bên, bên merci," said Michelange.

"Je suppose, pour une tail comme la vôtre. Il est solidement batti, n'est-ce pas?" he said, to Hope.

Michelange grinned more and more, but said nothing.

"Monsieur Carmayer, vous a prayvennu que nous avons besoin de vous, Samedi?" Mac went on.

"Oui, m'sieu."

"We're going to drag 'm round in a kyar dressed in nothing but a rhabbut-skin round us loyns, on closing day," said Mac, chuckling. "That's for Bâkhus; and Susanne Bontemps' coming with 'um for Adridny. We'll have to put her in tights, I reckon. . . . Ye're not sending in any pictures, ye say? That's a nice little stab, though, ye've got in the corner there. Very near same subject as you're doing now. I would have faked one up from the other. . . . And that's a damned good *pochade* ye've got there," he went on, walking about the studio. "That would worrk up very well in-deed, you see if 'ut wouldn't!"

Hope's brow cleared. That was a safe way of getting to his heart, to praise his studies in oils; though he really knew well enough that Mac's praise was not good for much. Mac had made a hit at the Salon, four years ago, by a piece of landscape, with some broken water in it—water

running down from a mill-dam; and, ever since, a picture of a weir or a mill-race, by the same hand, figured regularly in the Salon, and nearly always sold. He had pupils, too, whom he taught to paint weirs and mill-races, *ad infinitum;* and they never grew tired of displaying their skill, when once they had caught the trick.

"You'll find some black-and-white studies in that portfolio which you've never seen," Hope said. "Only I've sent the best of them to be framed to send in on Saturday."

He knew that Mac would go back to the bhoys and say: "I've been at Lancroft's studio all the morning. He just asked me to look at some of his sketches and choose out the best for exhibition. My stars! some of them are fine! Ye should come with me—(Smith or Jones)—some morning, and I'll get Lancroft to show 'um us."

For a while Mac was silent, or with only an occasional remark. "Hwere

will that be now? . . . St. John's? . . . I never was there. . . . Gosh! that nigger's fine! You've got right on to that, and no mistake! How he stands up, don't he? So you've been home." (America he meant.) "Hwhy didn't ye tell me ye were going, man? . . . That's St. James's Street, London, isn't it? Ye should have done Piccadilly Cirrcus, man, and the tarts ye see there between three and four in the afternoon. My Christ! but that's fine; better than Paris, I swear ut is! I was in England meself last month," he went on, "leastways in Glasga'; but I stopped in London, too, three days, on my way back. Who should I meet in the street, but Stanwick."

"Oh, Stanwick, yes, he's settled there," said Hope, with his eyes still on his easel.

"And doing pretty well, too, he says. Of course, not making a pile like you, ye lucky beggar; we don't, none of us, do that. He told me something about some

of your original drawings—some ye did for a book by that cousin of yours, as used to live in Paris. He'd seen 'um sold at a sale—ten drawings for 120*l.*, I think he said. And I suppose you'd knock off best part of the like of them in a day. Oh! We were talking of you. We said that probably you were the best black-and-white artist in England or America. . . . Well: I'll be on my way. But won't you come round to-night? Ye'd better."

"I daresay I will," said Hope.

"Yes, do. Ye'd better. Oh, I wish ye'd been there the other night. There was Checkly and Twining and O'Connell and Absorbant Brown, and three or four more of the bhoys in O'Connell's studio—I don't know how many of them ye'd know; and we had Susanne in, and made her as dhrunk as ye plase, and . . ."

And a somewhat lengthened history followed, as Mac stood at the door.

"Stop a minute," said Hope, suddenly changing his mind. "I'll come with you

now. Assez, Michelange, assez pour aujourd'hui," and the surprised model suddenly found himself restored to freedom. Hope had been ill-pleased at the interruption; now, he felt that he had better not be left alone, or IT would present itself in too importunate a way. "Come on, old man," he said, putting his arm in McMurrough's.

The action was one of those little touches in the right place, which Hope knew how to put in other things besides his black-and-white. That "come on, old man," and the pressure of Hope's hand on his arm, sent a thrill of pride through McMurrough; and were enough to make him the enthusiastic admirer of Hope's work for the rest of his life. Yet they cost Hope nothing at all.

That afternoon, and all that evening, Hope was, as the fellows agreed, "immense." There were times when Lancroft, the man with a reputation, the man of nearly thirty-three, enjoyed throwing himself, with full *bonhomie*,

among the "bhoys" of the class to whom "Old Mac" was a sort of Nestor. He launched epigrams on the popular English painters, or described them in society in England, and the airs they gave themselves; told (what was quite true) how, when a lady of consequence at an æsthetic party had once, in a whispered conversation, told him the price which Sir Francis Baldwin got for a certain picture, he had asked "if that included the frame?" Sir Francis was close by, and tried to look as if he had heard nothing; and Hope parodied Sir Francis' manner, and the manner of his lady admirers. And, all through, the talk was loaded with coarse inuendoes, which for this audience added the necessary spice, nay, the necessary sense of reality. For one of Hope's genuine feelings was an almost ferocious contempt for English art and the admirers and purchasers of English pictures.

And he stood a white wine; and they went off to finish the night at the Moulin

Rouge; and when he got to bed he was too tired and too confused to think of anything, and IT had been staved off at any rate for one day more.

. . . . .

But the attitude of his studio was in nowise changed when Hope went into it the next morning.

Who had he been with the night before? What a set of ruffians those art-students were, after all. How ridiculous it was to try to re-awake the echoes of his old self of ten years ago. Willie—he remembered what Mac had said about the price his illustrations of "London and Paris" had sold for. He had made that book—he forgot, had hardly noticed indeed, that it had run through three editions before the *édition de luxe* was thought of—just as he had made the author of it. What a selfish beggar Willie was! Never took the slightest notice of things about other people, if they went all right for himself. Hope had not seen his cousin for nearly a

year; but he still resented the look of rotundity and *bien-être* which Willie had worn at the end of last season in London. At the same time Hope knew that his cousin would welcome him with delight, if he chose to run over and put up at the chambers in Adam Street. And, secretly, he longed to go back to London and bask in Willie's good nature and amiability. After all, blood was thicker than water. What did all the art-students here, and more distinguished people—artists and authors—care about Hope Lancroft, the man—Hope Lancroft, who could have IT always lying in wait for him. "But I'll be damned if I'll go!" Hope said, to himself. Then a knock came at the door and the servant introduced Michelange. "Besides, I've my work to do," and he threw himself vigorously into his painting once more. . . .

"Oh, minç' alors, ça vient. Tu peux te reposer un instant. Not bad at all."

It was not the serene happiness of the creator that Hope felt at his work;

Willie knew much more of that feeling; not the sense of having found the end of existence in work which he could do well. But Hope enjoyed the mastering of his technique, the sense of overcoming difficulties which would have been too much for most of his contemporaries; the feeling of victorious combat was the breath of his nostrils. He liked to think of the number of specimens of his handiwork that were abroad in the world; and again of the amounts that he had received for them, sums which showed no tendency to decrease.

For a long time he kept himself contented with this last thought. He had had such a youth of privations, that it always seemed to him—even despite his own experience—that there must be infinite purchasing power in money. He cherished this belief as a sort of final rock of faith, and, as some other *croyants* do, made many shifts to avoid putting his faith to a crucial test. That is why he had become avaricious. He liked to think

of the thousands that he had already saved and invested. Every now and then he had been in the habit of putting a few hundreds into his pocket and going off to some specially alluring place of dissipation —generally to Monte Carlo or to Vienna. And then, when he had tasted of all the enjoyments of the senses the place could offer him, he would steal back to his work, not asking himself whether he were satisfied or not, and begin working hard and eagerly saving again. He was not exactly niggardly in giving. He was not richly endowed with generous instincts, but he had by nature a tender heart.

This day he could not keep his mind fixed upon his balance at the bankers; nay, that thought almost inevitably brought IT in its train. For Hope knew that, whatever might have been for him the purchasing power of money a short time ago, the ancient pleasures of sense could never suffice him now; now that his one idea of happiness was the possession of Thyrza Lemoine . . . .

Here he was embarked, curse it! upon the same old round. . . .

Hope had followed Thyrza to Canada. And it was there that she had at last confessed to him the dreadful secret of her disappearance from their circle in Paris long years ago—a story to make an honest man's blood boil. Hope's blood had boiled as he listened, and it made no difference in his feelings. He was more than ever anxious to lay his life at Thyrza's feet; he was still anxious to do so. She was a fool to have any scruples, if she cared for him. What did she owe to that scoundrel?

And yet, and yet . . . His suspicious nature had suggested to him that it could not be quite like that. . . .

Well, that was passed anyway and could not be amended. Nor could the upshot, though that, alas! was not past, namely that Thyrza was married—had married the curate with the red eyelids who went out with them to take charge of poor Winnstay. Hope still remem-

bered the look of the beast, whom he saw for the first and last time when he went to see his friend off at the Gare de Lyon. Winnstay's deprecating look and shrug of the shoulders as one should say, "You know what queer notions Thyrza has!" By God! To think of a boiled lobster like that being such an unutterable villain.

"I suppose by marrying her . . . What blackguards those parsons are!" Hope said to himself. "Well, it wouldn't be fair to give such a name to the governor," he added, with a grim laugh.

The man was dying; that was one thing. So Thyrza said, at least. She had had a message from him and had left Toronto to see him before her engagement was quite finished. But it was so very nearly finished; the forfeit she would have to pay would only be a small one. . . . Hope had sworn not to try and find out where she went to and to return to Europe; and he had loyally kept his word. The beggar might be dead now; but why didn't Thyrza write?

If she had only gone quite at the beginning of an engagement anywhere! Do what he would, Hope could not silence all his doubts. God! It was torture. How he had been hustled about! ["Oui, juste comme ça"—This to the model; Hope's French was apt to relapse in moments of agitation.] But then as he thought of these things the tones of Thyrza's voice suddenly came back to his ear, and his hand trembled as he held his brush. That voice was so infinitely soft and tragic. And he thought of Winnstay and what terrible hard luck the girl had had. Doubts or no doubts he would stick to her, he would be hanged if he would not. The pining of a soul hedged in by suspicions to do one utterly generous act came upon him.

Hope had trampled his way to success. He never owned to himself why it was he felt so isolated in his life. He never had allowed himself to think what it might have been for him if for instance he had taken Edith with him at the first,

or even sent for her a year after. She would have gone through anything to be with him in those early days. How different he and she might both have become if they had faced life together from the very first! Whenever he had come near that thought of late years, Hope had always said to himself that he could not have given her such a rough time; that when he was established he had always intended. . . But she got engaged and then married. After all *she* had been lucky enough. . . Hope chose to forget the other things which had stood in the way of their joining forces and facing life side by side. First his own delightful sense of freedom and self-dependence: then the alluring dissipations of a student's life. Then some *amours* of longer duration, which were not without a touch of romance in them.

His mind stayed on these for a moment—on one especially, Rose Roussel. He saw her the first day that she had come as a model to his studio, her wonderfully

bright eyes, the wonderful peach-colour of her cheeks. How his heart had beaten! He had really dreamed of a romantic attachment, dreamt of her choosing him, before all her other admirers. What a babe he had been in those days, clever as he thought himself! What an infant compared to Rose Roussel! And yet—and yet. Did he frankly (said his conscience far down within him) in his most romantic moments ever contemplate making any real sacrifice for the sake of Rose Roussel?

What dust and ashes they had all been—those days of half-romantic *amours*. Because, because—the thought would force itself upon him—he had never once "given himself away"; never really dreamt of doing so. He was to get all the profits, and run no risks. That had been his scheme of life. So it had all turned to dust and ashes; and nothing was left for him now but mere sense—those weeks of dissipation at Vienna or Monte Carlo, and then the creeping back to his studio and hard work.

Was it too late to make amends? And once again he turned as a devotee turns to look at his crucifix to gain strength, to think only of Thyrza's hard luck and of the tragic tones of her voice. He *would* make her amends: she *should* have a good time with him. Doubts or no doubts he would stick to her.

Yes, he would do one generous thing before he died.

Doubts or no doubts. . . She couldn't be playing fast and loose with him. Why should she? Then, with a horrible perversity of the mind, the recollection of his balance at the bankers came back as a soothing thought. All love, which was not tied within the strictest matrimonial knot, must be more or less at the command of money, he thought. A cynic would have said, "why make an exception for love of the most strictly matrimonial character?" Hope himself would have *said* this. But he felt somehow that there was a difference and that, if Thyrza could not take another husband,

his balance at the bankers, his growing prosperity, were things to be reckoned on his side.

"But if she had only been quite frank," he sorrowfully ejaculated, to wind up all the discussion that he was carrying on with himself.

END OF VOL. II.

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS-URBANA
3 0112 047687873